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COWPER'S MOTHER.

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THE

POEMS

OF

WILLIAM COWPER.

The Rustic Bridge

Edinburgh.

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[illegible]

W. [illegible]

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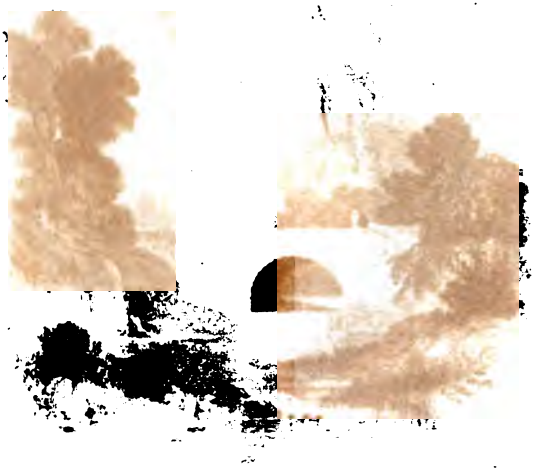

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POEMS

BY

WILLIAM [illegible]

The Frasten Bridge

Edinburgh.

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THE WORKS

OF

WILLIAM COWPER.

WITH

A LIFE AND NOTES,

BY

JOHN S. MEMES, LL.D.

AUTHOR OF "THE LIFE OF CANOVA," "THE HISTORY OF PAINTING, SCULPTURE, AND ARCHITECTURE," &c.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

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TABLE TALK.

RELIGION — its blessedness in this life — its regenerating influences preparatory to a world to come, inspire their pervading spirit into the strains of Cowper. The opening poem presents almost the sole exception. It is honourable to the taste or seriousness of these days, that the first place was originally assigned to it from this very absence of those topics, the frequent and felicitous introduction of which now constitute the great charm of his writings. "I think," says the poet in his *Private Correspondence*, "TABLE TALK will be the best to begin with, as the subjects of it are, perhaps, more popular. One would wish, at first setting out, to catch the public by the ear, and hold them by it as fast as possible, that they may be willing to hear one on a second and a third occasion. Now, Table Talk is a medley of many things; some that may be useful, and some that, for aught I know, may be very diverting. I am merry, that I may decoy people into my company, and grave that they may be the better for it. Now and then, I put on the garb of a philosopher, and take the opportunity that disguise procures me to drop a word in favour of religion. In short, there is some froth, and here and there a bit of sweetmeat, which seems to entitle it justly to the name of a certain dish the ladies call a trifle. I did not choose to be more facetious, lest I should consult the taste of my readers at the expense of my own approbation; nor more serious than I have been, lest I should forfeit theirs. Whether

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all this management and contrivance be necessary I do not know, but am inclined to suspect that if my Muse had gone forth clad in Quaker colour, without one bit of riband to enliven her appearance, she might walk from one end of London to the other as little noticed as if she were one of the sisterhood indeed." *February*, 1781. Newton, through whose hands the manuscripts of Cowper's first volume were transmitted to the press, concurred in this supposed necessity of forbearing to put religion foremost. "The poet's favourite topics," so the original preface composed by that divine expresses it, "are least insisted on in the piece entitled Table Talk; which, therefore, with some regard to the prevailing taste, and that those who are governed by it may not be discouraged at the very threshold from proceeding farther, is placed first." All this, we confess, resembles not a little that exclusive righteousness which, viewing with overweening partiality its own modes and attainments, is disposed to give to the world at large less credit than due for piety and serious thoughts. At all events, we feel assured that to the present age no such ground of precedence could be justly pleaded. Had not the order of these poems been fixed by long prescription, and also by some allusions in the Task, a different arrangement might now have been substituted with propriety.

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TABLE TALK.

Si te forte meæ gravis uret sarcina chartæ,
Abjicito. Hor. Lib. 1. Epist. 13.

A. You told me, I remember, glory, built
On selfish principles, is shame and guilt;
The deeds, that men admire as half divine,
Stark naught, because corrupt in their design.
Strange doctrine this! that without scruple tears
The laurel that the very lightning spares, [1]
Brings down the warrior's trophy to the dust,
And eats into his bloody sword like rust.

B. I grant that, men continuing what they are,
Fierce, avaricious, proud, there must be war;
And never meant the rule should be applied
To him that fights with justice on his side.

Let laurels, drench'd in pure Parnassian dews, [2]
Reward his mem'ry, dear to ev'ry muse,
Who, with a courage of unshaken root,
In honour's field advancing his firm foot,
Plants it upon the line that Justice draws,
And will prevail or perish in her cause.
'Tis to the virtues of such men, man owes
His portion in the good that Heaven bestows.
And when recording history displays
Feats of renown, though wrought in ancient days,
Tells of a few stout hearts that fought and died,
Where duty placed them, at their country's side;
The man, that is not moved with what he reads,
That takes not fire at their heroic deeds,

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Unworthy of the blessings of the brave,
Is base in kind, and born to be a slave.
  But let eternal infamy pursue
The wretch to nought but his ambition true,
Who, for the sake of filling with one blast
The post-horns of all Europe, lays her waste.
Think yourself station'd on a towering rock,
To see a people scatter'd like a flock,
Some royal mastiff panting at their heels,
With all the savage thirst a tiger feels;
Then view him self-proclaim'd in a gazette,
Chief monster that has plagued the nations yet.
The globe and sceptre in such hands misplaced,
Those ensigns of dominion how disgraced!
The glass, that bids man mark the fleeting hour,
And Death's own scythe would better speak his power;
Then grace the boney phantom, in their stead,
With the king's shoulder-knot and gay cockade;
Clothe the twin brethren in each other's dress,
The same their occupation and success.
  A. 'Tis your belief the world was made for man;
Kings do but reason on the self-same plan:
Maintaining yours, you cannot theirs condemn,
Who think, or seem to think, man made for them.
  B. Seldom, alas! the power of logic reigns
With much sufficiency in royal brains;
Such reas'ning falls like an inverted cone,
Wanting its proper base to stand upon.
Man made for kings! those optics are but dim,
That tell you so — say, rather, they for him.
That were indeed a king-ennobling thought,
Could they, or would they, reason as they ought.
The diadem, with mighty projects lined,
To catch renown by ruining mankind,
Is worth, with all its gold and glitt'ring store,
Just what the toy will sell for, and no more.
  Oh! bright occasions of dispensing good,[3]
How seldom used, how little understood!
To pour in virtue's lap her just reward,
Keep vice restrain'd behind a double guard;

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To quell the faction that affronts the throne,
By silent magnanimity alone;
To nurse with tender care the thriving arts,
Watch every beam philosophy imparts;
To give religion her unbridled scope,
Nor judge by statute a believer's hope;
With close fidelity, and love unfeign'd,
To keep the matrimonial bond unstain'd;
Covetous only of a virtuous praise,
His life a lesson to the land he sways;
To touch the sword with conscientious awe,
Nor draw it but when duty bids him draw;
To sheathe it in the peace-restoring close,
With joy beyond what victory bestows:
Blest country! where these kingly glories shine;
Blest England! if this happiness be thine.

A. Guard what you say; the patriotic tribe
Will sneer, and charge you with a bribe.—*B.* A bribe?
The worth of his three kingdoms I defy,
To lure me to the baseness of a lie:
And, of all lies, (be that one poet's boast,)
The lie that flatters I abhor the most.
Those arts be theirs, who hate his gentle reign;
But he that loves them has no need to feign.

A. Your smooth eulogium to one crown address'd,
Seems to imply a censure on the rest.

B. Quevedo, as he tells his sober tale,[4]
Ask'd, when in hell, to see the royal jail,
Approved their method in all other things,
"But where, good sir, do you confine your kings?"
"There," said his guide, "the group is full in view."
"Indeed!" replied the Don, "there are but few."
His black interpreter the charge disdain'd—
"Few, fellow?—there are all that ever reign'd."
Wit, undistinguishing, is apt to strike
The guilty and not guilty both alike.
I grant the sarcasm is too severe,
And we can readily refute it here,
While Alfred's name, the father of his age,
And the Sixth Edward's, grace th' historic page.

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A. Kings then, at last, have but the lot of all,
By their own conduct they must stand or fall.
B. True. While they live, the courtly laureat pays
His quit-rent ode, his peppercorn of praise;
And many a dunce, whose fingers itch to write,
Adds, as he can, his tributary mite.
A subject's faults a subject may proclaim,
A monarch's errors are forbidden game.
Thus, free from censure, overawed by fear,
And praised for virtues that they scorn to wear,
The fleeting forms of majesty engage
Respect, while stalking o'er life's narrow stage,
Then leave their crimes for history to scan,
And ask with busy scorn, Was this the man?
I pity kings, whom worship waits upon
Obsequious, from the cradle to the throne;
Before whose infant eyes the flatt'rer bows,
And binds a wreath about their baby brows;
Whom education stiffens into state,
And death awakens from that dream too late.
Oh! if servility with supple knees,
Whose trade it is to smile, to crouch, to please;
If smooth dissimulation, skill'd to grace
A devil's purpose with an angel's face;
If smiling peeresses, and simp'ring peers,
Encompassing his throne a few short years;
If the gilt carriage and the pamper'd steed,
That wants no driving, and disdains the lead;
If guards, mechanically form'd in ranks,
Playing, at beat of drum, their martial pranks,
Should'ring, and standing as if struck to stone,
While condescending majesty looks on:
If monarchy consist in such base things,
Sighing, I say again, I pity kings!
To be suspected, thwarted, and withstood,
Even when he labours for his country's good;
To see a band, call'd patriot for no cause,
But that they catch at popular applause,
Careless of all th' anxiety he feels,
Hook disappointment on the public wheels;

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With all their flippant fluency of tongue,
Most confident, when palpably most wrong:
If this be kingly, then farewell for me
All kingship, and may I be poor and free.
To be the table talk of clubs up stairs,[5]
To which th' unwash'd artificer repairs,
T' indulge his genius after long fatigue,
By diving into cabinet intrigue;
(For what kings deem a toil, as well they may,
To him is relaxation and mere play;)
To win no praise when well-wrought plans prevail,
But to be rudely censured when they fail;
To doubt the love his fav'rites may pretend,
And in reality to find no friend;
If he indulge a cultivated taste,
His galleries with the works of art well graced,
To hear it call'd extravagance and waste:
If these attendants, and if such as these,
Must follow royalty, then welcome ease;
However humble and confined the sphere,
Happy the state that has not these to fear,

A. Thus men, whose thoughts contemplative have dwelt
On situations that they never felt,
Start up sagacious, cover'd with the dust
Of dreaming study and pedantic rust,
And prate and preach about what others prove,
As if the world and they were hand and glove.
Leave kingly backs to cope with kingly cares,
They have their weight to carry, subjects theirs;
Poets, of all men, ever least regret
Increasing taxes and the nation's debt.
Could you contrive the payment, and rehearse
The mighty plan, oracular, in verse,
No bard, howe'er majestic, old or new,
Should claim my fixt attention more than you.

B. Not Brindley nor Bridgewater would essay[6]
To turn the course of Helicon that way;
Nor would the Nine consent the sacred tide
Should purl amidst the traffic of Cheapside,
Or tinkle in 'Change Alley, to amuse
The leathern ears of stockjobbers and Jews.

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A. Vouchsafe, at least, to pitch the key of rhyme
To themes more pertinent, if less sublime.
When ministers and ministerial arts;
Patriots, who love good places at their hearts;
When admirals, extoll'd for standing still,
Or doing nothing with a deal of skill;
Gen'rals, who will not conquer when they may,
Firm friends to peace, to pleasure, and good pay;
When Freedom, wounded almost to despair,
Though Discontent alone can find out where:
When themes like these employ the poet's tongue,
I hear as mute as if a syren sung.
Or tell me, if you can, what power maintains
A Briton's scorn of arbitrary chains?
That were a theme might animate the dead,
And move the lips of poets cast in lead.

B. The cause, though worth the search, may yet elude
Conjecture and remark, however shrewd.
They take, perhaps, a well directed aim,
Who seek it in his climate and his frame.
Lib'ral in all things else, yet Nature here
With stern severity deals out the year:
Winter invades the spring, and often pours
A chilling flood on summer's drooping flowers,
Unwelcome vapours quench autumnal beams,
Ungenial blasts attending curl the streams,
The peasants urge their harvest, ply the fork
With double toil, and shiver at their work;
Thus with a rigour, for his good design'd,
She rears her fav'rite man of all mankind.'
His form robust and of elastic tone,
Proportion'd well, half muscle and half bone,
Supplies with warm activity and force
A mind well-lodged, and masculine of course.
Hence, Liberty, sweet Liberty inspires
And keeps alive his fierce but noble fires.
Patient of constitutional control,
He bears it with meek manliness of soul:
But, if authority grow wanton, wo
To him that treads upon his free-born toe;

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One step beyond the bound'ry of the laws
Fires him at once in Freedom's glorious cause.
Thus proud Prerogative, not much revered,
Is seldom felt, though sometimes seen and heard;
And in his cage, like parrot fine and gay,
Is kept to strut, look big, and talk away.
Born in a climate softer far than ours,[8]
Not form'd, like us, with such Herculean powers,
The Frenchman, easy, debonair, and brisk,
Give him his lass, his fiddle, and his frisk,
Is always happy, reign whoever may,
And laughs the sense of misery far away.
He drinks his simple beverage with a gust,
And, feasting on an onion and a crust,
We never feel th' alacrity and joy,
With which he shouts and carols *Vive le Roy*,
Fill'd with as much true merriment and glee,
As if he heard his king say,—Slave, be free.
Thus happiness depends, as Nature shews,
Less on exterior things than most suppose.
Vigilant over all that he has made,
Kind Providence attends with gracious aid,
Bids equity throughout His works prevail,
And weighs the nations in an even scale;
He can encourage Slavery to a smile,
And fill with discontent a British isle.
A. Freeman and slave, then, if the case be such,
Stand on a level, and you prove too much:
If all men indiscriminately share
His fostering power and tutelary care,
As well be yoked by Despotism's hand,
As dwell at large in Britain's charter'd land.
B. No. Freedom has a thousand charms to show,
That slaves, howe'er contented, never know.
The mind attains, beneath her happy reign,
The growth that Nature meant she should attain:
The varied fields of science, ever new,
Op'ning and wider op'ning on her view,
She ventures onward with a prosp'rous force,
While no base fear impedes her in her course.

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Religion, richest favour of the skies,
Stands most reveal'd before the freeman's eyes;
No shades of superstition blot the day,
Liberty chases all that gloom away;
The soul, emancipated, unoppress'd,
Free to prove all things, and hold fast the best,
Learns much, and to a thousand list'ning minds
Communicates with joy the good she finds.
Courage in arms, and ever prompt to show
His manly forehead to the fiercest foe;
Glorious in war, but for the sake of peace,
His spirits rising as his toils increase,
Guards well what arts and industry have won,
And Freedom claims him for her first-born son.
Slaves fight for what were better cast away,
The chain that binds them, and a tyrant's sway;
But they that fight for freedom, undertake
The noblest cause mankind can have at stake,
Religion, virtue, truth, whate'er we call
A blessing—freedom is the pledge of all.
O Liberty! the pris'ner's pleasing dream,
The poet's muse, his passion, and his theme,
Genius is thine, and thou art Fancy's nurse,
Lost without thee th' ennobling powers of verse,
Heroic song from thy free touch acquires
Its clearest tone, the rapture it inspires;
Place me where Winter breathes his keenest air,
And I will sing, if Liberty be there;
And I will sing at Liberty's dear feet,
In Afric's torrid clime, or India's fiercest heat.

A. Sing where you please, in such a cause I grant
An English poet's privilege to rant;
But is not Freedom—at least is not ours—
Too apt to play the wanton with her powers,
Grow freakish, and, o'erleaping every mound,
Spread anarchy and terror all around?

B. Agreed. But would you sell or slay your horse
For bounding and curvetting in his course;
Or if, when ridden with a careless rein,
He break away, and seek the distant plain?

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No. His high mettle, under good control,
Gives him Olympic speed, and shoots him to the goal.
Let discipline employ her wholesome arts;
Let magistrates alert perform their parts,
Not skulk or put on a prudential mask,
As if their duty were a desp'rate task;
Let active laws apply the needful curb,
To guard the peace, that riot would disturb:
And Liberty, preserved from wild excess,
Shall raise no feuds for armies to suppress.
When Tumult lately burst his prison-door,[9]
And set plebeian thousands in a roar;
When he usurp'd Authority's just place,
And dared to look his master in the face;
When the rude rabble's watchword was—Destroy,
And blazing London seem'd a second Troy:
Liberty blush'd, and hung her drooping head,
Beheld their progress with the deepest dread;
Blush'd that effects like these she should produce,
Worse than the deeds of galley-slaves broke loose.
She loses in such storms her very name,
And fierce Licentiousness should bear the blame.
Incomparable gem! thy worth untold,
Cheap though blood bought, and thrown away when sold;
May no foes ravish thee, and no false friend
Betray thee, while professing to defend!
Prize it, ye ministers; ye monarchs, spare;
Ye patriots, guard it with a miser's care.
A. Patriots! alas! the few that have been found,
Where most they flourish, upon English ground,
The country's need have scantily supplied,
And the last left the scene when Chatham died.
B. Not so—the virtue still adorns our age,
Though the chief actor died upon the stage.[10]
In him Demosthenes was heard again,
Liberty taught him her Athenian strain;
She clothed him with authority and awe,
Spoke from his lips, and in his looks gave law.
His speech, his form, his action, full of grace,
And all his country beaming in his face,

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He stood as some inimitable hand
Would strive to make a Paul or Tully stand.*
No sycophant or slave, that dared oppose
Her sacred cause, but trembled when he rose;
And every venal stickler for the yoke
Felt himself crush'd at the first word he spoke.
Such men are raised to station and command,
When Providence means mercy to a land.
He speaks, and they appear; to Him they owe
Skill to direct, and strength to strike the blow;
To manage with address, to seize with power
The crisis of a dark decisive hour:
So Gideon earn'd a victory not his own;[11]
Subserviency his praise, and that alone.
Poor England! thou art a devoted deer,[12]
Beset with every ill but that of fear.
Thee nations hunt; all mark thee for a prey;
They swarm around thee, and thou stand'st at bay,
Undaunted still, though wearied and perplex'd:
Once Chatham saved thee; but who saves thee next?
Alas! the tide of pleasure sweeps along
All that should be the boast of British song.
'Tis not the wreath, that once adorn'd thy brow,
The prize of happier times, will serve thee now.
Our ancestry, a gallant, Christian race,
Patterns of every virtue, every grace,
Confess'd a God; they kneel'd before they fought,
And praised Him in the victories He wrought.
Now from the dust of ancient days bring forth
Their sober zeal, integrity, and worth;
Courage, ungraced by these, affronts the skies,
Is but the fire without the sacrifice.
The stream, that feeds the well-spring of the heart,
Not more invigorates life's noblest part,
Than virtue quickens, with a warmth divine,
The powers, that sin has brought to a decline.
A. Th' inestimable Estimate of Brown[13]
Rose like a paper-kite, and charm'd the town;

* Such as Raffael has drawn his Apostle preaching at Lystra,—simple, earnest, severe.

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But measures, plann'd and executed well,
Shifted the wind that raised it, and it fell.
He trod the very self-same ground you tread,
And victory refuted all he said.

B. And yet his judgment was not framed amiss,
Its error, if it err'd, was merely this,—
He thought the dying hour already come,
And a complete recovery struck him dumb.

But that effeminacy, folly, lust,
Enervate and enfeeble, and needs must,
And that a nation shamefully debased,
Will be despised and trampled on at last,
Unless sweet penitence her powers renew,
Is truth, if history itself be true.
There is a time, and Justice marks the date,
For long-forbearing Clemency to wait;
That hour elapsed, th' incurable revolt
Is punish'd, and down comes the thunderbolt.
If Mercy then put by the threat'ning blow,
Must she perform the same kind office now?
May she! and, if offended Heaven be still
Accessible; and prayer prevail, she will.
'Tis not, however, insolence and noise,
The tempest of tumultuary joys,
Nor is it yet despondence and dismay
Will win her visits, or engage her stay;
Prayer only, and the penitential tear,
Can call her smiling down, and fix her here.

But when a country, one that I could name,
In prostitution sinks the sense of shame;
When infamous Venality, grown bold,
Writes on his bosom, "To be let or sold:"
When Perjury, that Heaven-defying vice,
Sells oaths by tale, and at the lowest price;
Stamps God's own name upon a lie just made,
To turn a penny in the way of trade:
When Av'rice starves, and never hides his face,
Two or three millions of the human race,
And not a tongue inquires, how, where, or when,
Though conscience will have twinges now and then:

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When profanation of the sacred cause
In all its parts, times, ministry, and laws,
Bespeaks a land, once Christian, fallen and lost
In all that wars against that title most;
What follows next, let cities of great name,
And regions long since desolate, proclaim—
Nineveh, Babylon, and ancient Rome,
Speak to the present times, and times to come;
They cry aloud, in every careless ear,
Stop, while ye may, suspend your mad career;
Oh, learn from our example and our fate,
Learn wisdom and repentance, ere too late.
Not only vice disposes and prepares [14]
The mind, that slumbers sweetly in her snares,
To stoop to tyranny's usurp'd command,
And bend her polish'd neck beneath his hand,
(A dire effect, by one of Nature's laws
Unchangeably connected with its cause,)
But Providence himself will intervene,
To throw His dark displeasure o'er the scene.
All are His instruments; each form of war,
What burns at home, or threatens from afar;
Nature in arms, her elements at strife,
The storms that overset the joys of life,
Are but His rods to scourge a guilty land,
And waste it at the bidding of his hand.
He gives the word, and mutiny soon roars
In all her gates, and shakes her distant shores;
The standards of all nations are unfurl'd,
She has one foe, and that one foe the world;
And, if he doom that people with a frown,
And mark them with a seal of wrath press'd down,
Obduracy takes place; callous and tough,
The reprobated race grows judgment-proof;
Earth shakes beneath them, and heaven roars above,
But nothing scares them from the course they love:
To the lascivous pipe and wanton song,
That charm down fear, they frolic it along,
With mad rapidity and unconcern,
Down to the gulf, from which is no return.

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They trust in navies, and their navies fail—
God's curse can cast away ten thousand sail!
They trust in armies, and their courage dies;
In wisdom, wealth, in fortune, and in lies;
But all they trust in withers, as it must,
When He commands, in whom they place no trust.
Vengeance at last pours down upon their coast
A long despised, but now victorious host;
Tyranny sends the chain that must abridge
The noble sweep of all their privilege,
Gives liberty the last, the mortal shock,
Slips the slave's collar on, and snaps the lock.

A. Such lofty strains embellish what you teach;
Mean you to prophesy, or but to preach?

B. I know the mind, that feels indeed the fire
The muse imparts, and can command the lyre,
Acts with a force, and kindles with a zeal,
Whate'er the theme, that others never feel.
If human woes her soft attention claim,
A tender sympathy pervades the frame;
She pours a sensibility divine
Along the nerve of every feeling line.
But if a deed, not tamely to be borne,
Fire indigation and a sense of scorn,
The strings are swept with such a power, so loud,
The storm of music shakes th' astonish'd crowd.
So, when remote futurity is brought
Before the keen inquiry of her thought,
A terrible sagacity informs
The poet's heart; he looks to distant storms;
He hears the thunder ere the tempest low'rs;
And, arm'd with strength surpassing human pow'rs,
Seizes events as yet unknown to man,
And darts his soul into the dawning plan.
Hence, in a Roman mouth, the graceful name
Of prophet and of poet was the same;
Hence British poets too the priesthood shared,
And every hallow'd druid was a bard.
But no prophetic fires to me belong;
I play with syllables, and sport in song.

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A. At Westminster, where little poets strive
To set a distich upon six and five,
Where discipline helps op'ning buds of sense,
And makes his pupils proud with silver pence,
I was a poet too; but modern taste
Is so refined, and delicate, and chaste,
That verse, whatever fire the fancy warms,
Without a creamy smoothness has no charms.
Thus, all success depending on an ear,
And thinking I might purchase it too dear,
If sentiment were sacrificed to sound,
And truth cut short to make a period round,
I judged a man of sense could scarce do worse,
Than caper in the morris-dance of verse.

B. Thus reputation is a spur to wit,
And some wits flag through fear of losing it.
Give me the line that ploughs its stately course
Like a proud swan, conqu'ring the stream by force;
That, like some cottage beauty, strikes the heart,
Quite unindebted to the tricks of art.
When labour and when dulness, club in hand,
Like the two figures at St Dunstan's, stand
Beating alternately, in measured time,
The clock-work tintinnabulum of rhyme,
Exact and regular the sounds will be;
But such mere quarter-strokes are not for me.
From him who rears a poem lank and long,
To him who strains his all into a song,—
Perhaps some bonny Caledonian air,
All birks and braes, though he was never there;
Or, having whelp'd a prologue with great pains,
Feels himself spent, and fumbles for his brains;
A prologue interdash'd with many a stroke—
An art contrived to advertise a joke,
So that the jest is clearly to be seen,
Not in the words—but in the gap between:
Manner is all in all, whate'er is writ,
The substitute for genius, sense, and wit.
To dally much with subjects mean and low,
Proves that the mind is weak, or makes it so.

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Neglected talents rust into decay,
And every effort ends in push-pin play.
The man that means success, should soar above
A soldier's feather, or a lady's glove;
Else, summoning the muse to such a theme,
The fruit of all her labour is whipt cream.
As if an eagle flew aloft, and then —
Stoop'd from its highest pitch to pounce a wren.
As if the poet, purposing to wed,
Should carve himself a wife in gingerbread.
Ages elapsed ere Homer's lamp appear'd,
And ages ere the Mantuan swan was heard:
To carry nature lengths unknown before,
To give a Milton birth, ask'd ages more.
Thus Genius rose and set at order'd times,
And shot a day-spring into distant climes,
Ennobling every region that he chose;
He sunk in Greece, in Italy he rose;
And, tedious years of Gothic darkness pass'd,
Emerged all splendour in our isle at last.
Thus lovely halcyons dive into the main,
Then shew far off their shining plumes again.
A. Is genius only found in epic lays?
Prove this, and forfeit all pretence to praise.
Make their heroic powers your own at once,
Or candidly confess yourself a dunce.
B. These were the chief; each interval of night
Was graced with many an undulating light.
In less illustrious bards his beauty shone
A meteor, or a star; in these, the sun.
The nightingale may claim the topmost bough,
While the poor grasshopper must chirp below.
Like him unnoticed, I, and such as I,
Spread little wings, and rather skip than fly;
Perch'd on the meagre produce of the land,
An ell or two of prospect we command;
But never peep beyond the thorny bound,
Or oaken fence, that hems the paddock round.
In Eden, ere yet innocence of heart
Had faded, poetry was not an art:

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Language, above all teaching, or, if taught,
Only by gratitude and glowing thought,
Elegant as simplicity, and warm
As ecstasy, unmanacled by form —
Not prompted, as in our degenerate days,
By low ambition and the thirst of praise —
Was natural as is the flowing stream,
And yet magnificent — a God the theme!
That theme on earth exhausted, though above
Tis found as everlasting as his love:
Man lavish'd all his thoughts on human things, —
The feats of heroes, and the wrath of kings;
But still, while virtue kindled his delight,
The song was moral, and so far was right.
'Twas thus, till luxury seduced the mind
To joys less innocent, as less refined;
Then Genius danced a bacchanal; he crown'd
The brimming goblet, seized the thyrsus, bound
His brows with ivy, rush'd into the field
Of wild imagination, and there reel'd,
The victim of his own lascivious fires,
And, dizzy with delight, profaned the sacred wires.
Anacreon, Horace, play'd in Greece and Rome
This bedlam part; and others nearer home.
When Cromwell fought for power, and while he reign'd
The proud protector of the power he gain'd,
Religion harsh, intolerant, austere,
Parent of manners like herself severe,
Drew a rough copy of the Christian face,
Without the smile, the sweetness, or the grace;
The dark and sullen humour of the time
Judged every effort of the muse a crime;
Verse, in the finest mould of fancy cast,
Was lumber in an age so void of taste:
But when the second Charles assumed the sway,
And arts revived beneath a softer day,
Then, like a bow long forced into a curve,
The mind, released from too constrain'd a nerve,
Flew to its first position with a spring,
That made the vaulted roofs of pleasure ring.

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His court, the dissolute and hateful school
Of wantonness, where vice was taught by rule,
Swarm'd with a scribbling herd, as deep inlaid
With brutal lust as ever Circe made.
From these a long succession, in the rage
Of rank obscenity, debauch'd their age;
Nor ceased, till, ever anxious to redress
The abuses of her sacred charge, the press,
The Muse instructed a well nurtured train
Of abler votaries to cleanse the stain,
And claim the palm for purity of song,
That lewdness had usurp'd and worn so long.
Then decent pleasantry and sterling sense,
That neither gave nor would endure offence,
Whipp'd out of sight, with satire just and keen,
The puppy pack that had defiled the scene.
In front of these came Addison. In him
Humour in holiday and sightly trim,
Sublimity, and Attic taste, combined
To polish, furnish, and delight the mind:
Then Pope, as harmony itself exact,
In verse well disciplined, complete, compact,
Gave virtue and morality a grace,
That, quite eclipsing pleasure's painted face,
Levied a tax of wonder and applause,
E'en on the fools that trampled on their laws.
But he (his musical finesse was such,
So nice his ear, so delicate his touch)
Made poetry a mere mechanic art,
And ev'ry warbler has his tune by heart.
Nature imparting her satiric gift,
Her serious mirth, to Arbuthnot and Swift,
With droll sobriety they raised a smile
At folly's cost, themselves unmoved the while.
That constellation set, the world in vain
Must hope to look upon their like again.
A. Are we then left —— *B.* Not wholly in the dark,
Wit now and then, struck smartly, shews a spark,
Sufficient to redeem the modern race
From total night and absolute disgrace.

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While servile trick and imitative knack
Confine the million in the beaten track,
Perhaps some courser, who disdains the road,
Snuffs up the wind, and flings himself abroad.
Contemporaries all surpass'd, see one —
Short his career, indeed, but ably run —
Churchill;[15] himself unconscious of his powers,
In penury consumed his idle hours;
And, like a scatter'd seed at random sown,
Was left to spring by vigour of his own.
Lifted at length, by dignity of thought
And dint of genius, to an affluent lot,
He laid his head in luxury's soft lap,
And took, too often, there his easy nap.
If brighter beams than all he threw not forth,
'Twas negligence in him, not want of worth.
Surly and slovenly, and bold and coarse,
Too proud for art, and trusting in mere force,
Spendthrift alike of money and of wit,
Always at speed, and never drawing bit,
He struck the lyre in such a careless mood,
And so disdain'd the rules he understood;
The laurel seem'd to wait on his command,
He snatch'd it rudely from the Muses' hand.
Nature, exerting an unwearied power,
Forms, opens, and gives scent to ev'ry flower;
Spreads the fresh verdure of the field, and leads
The dancing Naiads through the dewy meads:
She fills profuse ten thousand little throats
With music, modulating all their notes;
And charms the woodland scenes and wilds unknown,
With artless airs and concerts of her own:
But seldom (as if fearful of expense)
Vouchsafes to man a poet's just pretence, —
Fervency, freedom, fluency of thought,
Harmony, strength, words exquisitely sought;
Fancy, that from the bow that spans the sky,
Brings colours dipp'd in heaven, that never die;
A soul exalted above earth, a mind
Skill'd in the characters that form mankind;

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And, as the sun in rising beauty dress'd,
Looks to the westward from the dappled east,
And marks, whatever clouds may interpose,
Ere yet his race begins, its glorious close;
An eye like his to catch the distant goal;
Or, ere the wheels of verse begin to roll,
Like his to shed illuminating rays
On every scene and subject it surveys:
Thus graced, the man asserts a poet's name,
And the world cheerfully admits the claim.
Pity Religion has so seldom found
A skilful guide into poetic ground!
The flowers would spring where'er she deign'd to stray,
And every muse attend her in her way.
Virtue indeed meets many a rhyming friend,
And many a compliment politely penn'd;
But, unattired in that becoming vest
Religion weaves for her, and half undress'd,
Stands in the desert, shiv'ring and forlorn,
A wintry figure, like a wither'd thorn.
The shelves are full, all other themes are sped;
Hackney'd and worn to the last flimsy thread,
Satire has long since done his best, and curst
And loathsome ribaldry has done his worst;
Fancy has sported all her powers away
In tales, in trifles, and in children's play;
And 'tis the sad complaint, and almost true,
Whate'er we write, we bring forth nothing new.
'Twere new indeed to see a bard, all fire,
Touch'd with a coal from Heaven, assume the lyre,
And tell the world, still kindling as he sung,
With more than mortal music on his tongue,
That He, who died below, and reigns above,
Inspires the song, and that his name is Love.
  For, after all, if merely to beguile,
By flowing numbers and a flowery style,
The tedium that the lazy rich endure,
Which now and then sweet poetry may cure;
Or, if to see the name of idol self,
Stamp'd on the well bound quarto, grace the shelf,

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To float a bubble on the breath of fame,
Prompt his endeavour and engage his aim,
Debased to servile purposes of pride,
How are the powers of genius misapplied!
The gift, whose office is the Giver's praise,
To trace him in his word, his works, his ways;
Then spread the rich discovery, and invite
Mankind to share in the divine delight;
Distorted from its use and just design,
To make the pitiful possessor shine;
To purchase, at the fool frequented fair
Of vanity, a wreath for self to wear,
Is profanation of the basest kind—
Proof of a trifling and a worthless mind.

A. Hail Sternhold, then; and Hopkins, hail!

B. Amen.

If flattery, folly, lust, employ the pen;
If acrimony, slander, and abuse,
Give it a charge to blacken and traduce;
Though Butler's wit, Pope's numbers, Prior's ease,
With all that fancy can invent to please,
Adorn the polish'd periods as they fall,
One madrigal of theirs is worth them all.

A. 'Twould thin the ranks of the poetic tribe,
To dash the pen through all that you proscribe.

B. No matter—we could shift when they were not,
And should, no doubt, if they were all forgot.

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PROGRESS OF ERROR.

Of the pieces composing Cowper's first volume, the Progress of Error was first written, being the earliest original poem of considerable length which he produced. Both the title and the subject were suggested by Mrs Unwin, at whose urgent entreaty the work was commenced, in the beginning of December, 1780. The poet, even in this initiatory attempt, must have advanced with rapidity, since we find him writing to a clerical friend on the 21st of the same month:—"It will not be long, perhaps, before you will receive a poem called the Progress of Error, that will be succeeded by another in due time. Don't be alarmed. I ride Pegasus with a curb. He will never run away with me again." Early in January following, the poem appears to have been forwarded in terms of this promise; for, a month afterwards, he again addresses Mr Newton:—"I am glad that the Progress of Error did not err in its progress, as I feared it had, and that it reached you safe; and still more pleased that it has met with your approbation; for, if it had not, I should have wished it had miscarried." The poem was, however, afterwards revised, and some alterations and additions made, before being finally committed to the press in March, 1781.

This poem is the least pleasing of Cowper's productions: still it exhibits passages of great power, and a general honesty

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and earnestness of purpose that, with the eloquence of truth, win their way to the affections. As a specimen of versification merely, it is harsh and unfinished, displaying little of that consummate mastery over language which he afterwards attained: while, as a didactic work, it shews a deficiency in definite, or at least obvious, aim. It abounds, however, in those pointed remarks, and striking sentences, peculiarly characteristic of the author's manner, and which render his writings a rich repository of sayings that fix themselves deeply on the memory, as useful rules of conduct, or salutary precepts for the secret and silent improvement of the heart.

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THE PROGRESS OF ERROR.

Si quid loquar audiendum.—Hor. Lib. iv. Od. 2.

Sing, Muse, (if such a theme, so dark, so long,
May find a Muse to grace it with a song)
By what unseen and unsuspected arts
The serpent Error twines round human hearts;
Tell where she lurks, beneath what flowery shades,
That not a glimpse of genuine light pervades,
The pois'nous, black, insinuating worm[1]
Successfully conceals her loathsome form.
Take, if ye can, ye careless and supine,
Counsel and caution from a voice like mine!
Truths, that the theorist could never reach,
And observation taught me, I would teach.
  Not all whose eloquence the fancy fills,
Musical as the chime of tinkling rills,
Weak to perform, though mighty to pretend,
Can trace her mazy windings to their end;
Discern the fraud beneath the specious lure,
Prevent the danger, or prescribe the cure.
The clear harangue, and cold as it is clear,
Falls soporific on the listless ear;
Like quicksilver, the rhet'ric they display
Shines as it runs, but grasp'd at slips away.
  Placed for his trial on this bustling stage,
From thoughtless youth to ruminating age,
Free in his will to choose or to refuse,
Man may improve the crisis or abuse;
Else, on the fatalist's unrighteous plan,
Say to what bar amenable were man?
With nought in charge, he could betray no trust;
And, if he fell, would fall because he must;

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If love reward him, or if vengeance strike,
His recompense is both unjust alike.
Divine authority within his breast
Brings every thought, word, action to the test;
Warns him or prompts, approves him or restrains,
As reason, or as passion, takes the reins.
Heaven from above, and conscience from within,
Cries in his startled ear,—"Abstain from sin!"
The world around solicits his desire,
And kindles in his soul a treach'rous fire:
While, all his purposes and steps to guard,
Peace follows virtue as its sure reward;
And pleasure brings as surely in her train
Remorse, and sorrow, and vindictive pain.
Man, thus endued with an elective voice,
Must be supplied with objects of his choice,
Where'er he turns, enjoyment and delight,
Or present, or in prospect, meet his sight;
Those open on the spot their honey'd store;
These call him loudly to pursuit of more.
His unexhausted mine the sordid vice
Avarice shews, and virtue is the price.
Here various motives his ambition raise,—
Power, pomp, and splendour, and the thirst of praise;
There beauty woos him with expanded arms;
E'en Bacchanalian madness has its charms.
Nor these alone, whose pleasures, less refined,
Might well alarm the most unguarded mind,
Seek to supplant his inexperienced youth,
Or lead him devious from the path of truth;
Hourly allurements on his passions press,
Safe in themselves, but dangerous in th' excess.
Hark! how it floats upon the dewy air;
Oh, what a dying, dying close was there!
'Tis harmony from yon sequester'd bower,
Sweet harmony, that soothes the midnight hour!
Long ere the charioteer of day had run
His morning course, th' enchantment was begun;
And he shall gild yon mountain's height again,
Ere yet the pleasing toil becomes a pain.

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Is this the rugged path, the steep ascent,
That virtue points to? Can a life thus spent
Lead to the bliss she promises the wise,
Detach the soul from earth, and speed her to the skies?
Ye devotees to your adored employ,
Enthusiasts, drunk with an unreal joy,
Love makes the music of the blest above,
Heaven's harmony is universal love;
And earthly sounds, though sweet and well combined,
And lenient as soft opiates to the mind,
Leave vice and folly unsubdued behind.

Gray dawn appears; the sportsman and his train
Speckle the bosom of the distant plain;
'Tis he, the Nimrod of the neighb'ring lairs;
Save that his scent is less acute than theirs,
For persevering chase, and headlong leaps,
True beagle as the stanchest hound he keeps.
Charged with the folly of his life's mad scene,
He takes offence, and wonders what you mean;
The joy the danger and the toil o'erpays—
'Tis exercise, and health, and length of days.
Again impetuous to the field he flies;
Leaps every fence but one, there falls and dies;
Like a slain deer, the tumbrel brings him home,
Unmiss'd but by his dogs, and by his groom.[2]

Ye clergy, while your orbit is your place,
Lights of the world, and stars of human race;
But if, eccentric, ye forsake your sphere,
Prodigies ominous, and view'd with fear;
The comet's baneful influence is a dream;
Your's real, and pernicious in th' extreme.
What then!—are appetites and lusts laid down
With the same ease that man puts on his gown?
Will av'rice and concupiscence give place,
Charm'd by the sounds—Your Rev'rence, or Your Grace?
No. But his own engagement binds him fast;
Or, if it does not, brands him to the last,
What atheists call him—a designing knave,
A mere church juggler, hypocrite, and slave.

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Oh, laugh or mourn with me the rueful jest,
A cassock'd huntsman, and a fiddling priest!
He from Italian songsters takes his cue:
Set Paul to music, he shall quote him too.
He takes the field, the master of the pack
Cries, "Well done, saint!" and claps him on the back.
Is this the path of sanctity? Is this
To stand a waymark in the road to bliss?
Himself a wand'rer from the narrow way,
His silly sheep, what wonder if they stray?
Go, cast your orders at your bishop's feet,
Send your dishonour'd gown to Monmouth Street!
The sacred function in your hands is made—
Sad sacrilege! no function, but a trade!
  Occiduus is a pastor of renown,[3]
When he has pray'd and preach'd the Sabbath down,
With wire and catgut he concludes the day,
Quavering and semiquavering care away.
The full concerto swells upon your ear;
All elbows shake. Look in, and you would swear
The Babylonian tyrant with a nod
Had summon'd them to serve his golden god.
So well that thought the employment seems to suit,
Psalt'ry and sackbut, dulcimer and flute.
Oh fie! 'tis evangelical and pure:
Observe each face, how sober and demure!
Ecstasy sets her stamp on every mien;
Chins fallen, and not an eye-ball to be seen.
Still I insist, though music heretofore
Has charm'd me much, not even Occiduus more,
Love, joy, and peace, make harmony more meet
For Sabbath ev'nings, and perhaps as sweet.
  Will not the sickliest sheep of every flock
Resort to this example as a rock;
There stand, and justify the foul abuse
Of Sabbath hours with plausible excuse?
If apostolic gravity be free
To play the fool on Sundays, why not we?
If he the tinkling harpsichord regards
As inoffensive, what offence in cards?

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Strike up the fiddles, let us all be gay,
Laymen have leave to dance, if parsons play.
  Oh Italy! thy Sabbaths will be soon
Our Sabbaths, closed with mumm'ry and buffoon.
Preaching and pranks will share the motley scene,
Our's parcell'd out, as thine have ever been,
God's worship and the mountebank between.
What says the prophet? Let that day be blest
With holiness and consecrated rest.
Pastime and business both it should exclude,
And bar the door the moment they intrude:
Nobly distinguish'd above all the six
By deeds, in which the world must never mix.
Hear him again. He calls it a delight,
A day of luxury observed aright,
When the glad soul is made Heaven's welcome guest,
Sits banqueting, and God provides the feast.
But triflers are engaged and cannot come;
Their answer to the call is—"Not at home."
  O the dear pleasures of the velvet plain,
The painted tablets, dealt and dealt again!
Cards, with what rapture, and the polish'd die,
The yawning chasm of indolence supply!
Then to the dance, and make the sober moon
Witness of joys that shun the sight of noon.
Blame, cynic, if you can, quadrille or ball,
The snug close party, or the splendid hall,
Where night, down-stooping from her ebon throne,
Views constellations brighter than her own.
'Tis innocent, and harmless, and refined,
The balm of care, elysium of the mind.
Innocent! Oh if venerable Time,
Slain at the foot of pleasure, be no crime,
Then, with his silver beard and magic wand,
Let Comus rise archbishop of the land;
Let him your rubric and your feasts prescribe,
Grand metropolitan of all the tribe.
  Of manners rough, and coarse athletic cast,
The rank debauch suits Clodio's filthy taste.
Rufillus, exquisitely form'd by rule,
Not of the moral but the dancing school,

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Wonders at Clodio's follies, in a tone
As tragical as others at his own.
He cannot drink five bottles, bilk the score,
Then kill a constable, and drink five more;
But he can draw a pattern, make a tart,
And has the ladies' etiquette by heart.
Go, fool; and arm in arm with Clodio, plead
Your cause before a bar you little dread;
But know, the law that bids the drunkard die,
Is far too just to pass the trifler by.
Both baby-featured, and of infant size,
View'd from a distance, and with heedless eyes,
Folly and innocence are so alike,
The diff'rence, though essential, fails to strike.
Yet folly ever has a vacant stare,
A simpering count'nance, and a trifling air;
But innocence, sedate, serene, erect,
Delights us, by engaging our respect.
Man, Nature's guest by invitation sweet,
Receives from her both appetite and treat;
But, if he play the glutton and exceed,
His benefactress blushes at the deed:
For Nature, nice, as liberal to dispense,
Made nothing but a brute the slave of sense.
Daniel ate pulse by choice—example rare!
Heaven bless'd the youth, and made him fresh and fair.
Gorgonius sits, abdominous and wan,
Like a fat squab upon a Chinese fan:
He snuffs far off th' anticipated joy;
Turtle and ven'son all his thoughts employ;
Prepares for meals as jockeys take a sweat,
Oh, nauseous!—an emetic for a whet!
Will Providence o'erlook the wasted good?
Temperance were no virtue if He could.
That pleasures, therefore, or what such we call,
Are hurtful, is a truth confess'd by all.
And some, that seem to threaten virtue less,
Still hurtful in th' abuse, or by th' excess.
Is man, then, only for his torment placed
The centre of delights he may not taste?

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Like fabled Tantalus, condemn'd to hear
The precious stream still purling in his ear,
Lip-deep in what he longs for, and yet curst
With prohibition and perpetual thirst?
No, wrangler—destitute of shame and sense,
The precept that enjoins man abstinence,
Forbids him none but the licentious joy,
Whose fruit, though fair, tempts only to destroy.
Remorse, the fatal egg by pleasure laid
In ev'ry bosom where her nest is made,
Hatch'd by the beams of truth, denies him rest,
And proves a raging scorpion in his breast.
No pleasure? Are domestic comforts dead?
Are all the nameless sweets of friendship fled?
Has time worn out, or fashion put to shame
Good sense, good health, good conscience, and good fame?
All these belong to virtue, and all prove
That virtue has a title to your love.
Have you no touch of pity, that the poor
Stand starved at your inhospitable door?
Or if yourself, too scantily supplied,
Need help, let honest industry provide.
Earn, if you want; if you abound, impart:
These both are pleasures to the feeling heart.
No pleasure? has some sickly eastern waste
Sent us a wind to parch us at a blast?
Can British Paradise no scenes afford
To please her sated and indiff'rent lord?
Are sweet philosophy's enjoyments run
Quite to the lees? And has religion none?
Brutes capable would tell you 'tis a lie,
And judge you from the kennel and the sty.
Delights like these, ye sensual and profane,
Ye are bid, begg'd, besought, to entertain;
Call'd to these crystal streams, do ye turn off
Obscene to swill and swallow at a trough?
Envy the beast then, on whom Heaven bestows
Your pleasures, with no curses in the close.
  Pleasure admitted in undue degree
Enslaves the will, nor leaves the judgment free.

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'Tis not alone the grape's enticing juice
Unnerves the moral powers, and mars their use;
Ambition, av'rice, and the lust of fame,
And wōman, lovely woman, does the same.
The heart, surrender'd to the ruling power
Of some ungovern'd passion ev'ry hour,
Finds by degrees the truths, that once bore sway,
And all their deep impression, wears away;
So coin grows smooth, in traffic current pass'd,
Till Cæsar's image is effaced at last.
The breach, though small at first, soon op'ning wide,
In rushes folly with a full-moon tide.
Then welcome errors of whatever size,
To justify it by a thousand lies.
As creeping ivy clings to wood or stone,
And hides the ruin that it feeds upon;
So sophistry cleaves close to and protects
Sin's rotten trunk, concealing its defects.
Mortals, whose pleasures are their only care,
First wish to be imposed on, and then are;
And, lest the foulsome artifice should fail,
Themselves will hide its coarseness with a veil.
Not more industrious are the just and true,
To give to virtue what is virtue's due—
The praise of wisdom, comeliness, and worth,
And call her charms to public notice forth—
Than Vice's mean and disingenuous race,
To hide the shocking features of her face.
Her form with dress and lotion they repair;
Then kiss their idol, and pronounce her fair.
The sacred implement I now employ
Might prove a mischief, or, at best, a toy;
A trifle, if it move but to amuse;
But, if to wrong the judgment and abuse,
Worse than a poniard in the basest hand,
It stabs at once the morals of a land.
Ye writers of what none with safety reads,
Footing it in the dance that fancy leads;
Ye novelists, who mar what ye would mend,
Sniv'lling and driv'lling folly without end,

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Whose corresponding misses fill the ream
With sentimental frippery and dream,
Caught in a delicate soft silken net
By some lewd earl, or rakehell baronet;
Ye pimps, who under virtue's fair pretence,
Steal to the closet of young innocence,
And teach her, inexperienced yet, and green,
To scribble as ye scribbled at fifteen;
Who kindling a combustion of desire,
With some cold moral think to quench the fire;
Though all your engineering proves in vain,
The dribbling stream ne'er puts it out again:
Oh, that a verse had power, and could command
Far, far away these flesh-flies of the land;
Who fasten without mercy on the fair,
And suck, and leave a craving maggot there!
Howe'er disguised th' inflammatory tale,
And cover'd with a fine-spun specious veil;
Such writers, and such readers, owe the gust
And relish of their pleasure all to lust.
  But the muse, eagle-pinion'd, has in view
A quarry more important still than you;
Down, down the wind she swims, and sails away,
Now stoops upon it, and now grasps the prey.
  Petronius! all the Muses weep for thee;[4]
But ev'ry tear shall scald thy memory:
The Graces, too, while virtue at their shrine
Lay bleeding under that soft hand of thine,
Felt each a mortal stab in her own breast,
Abhorr'd the sacrifice, and cursed the priest.
Thou polish'd and high-finish'd foe to truth,
Graybeard corrupter of our list'ning youth,
To purge and skim away the filth of vice,
That, so refined, it might the more entice,
Then pour it on the morals of thy son;
To taint *his* heart, was worthy of *thine own.*
Now, while the poison all high life pervades,
Write, if thou canst, one letter from the shades,
One, and one only, charged with deep regret,
That thy worst part, thy principles, live yet:

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One sad epistle thence may cure mankind
Of the plague spread by bundles left behind.
'Tis granted, and no plainer truth appears,
Our most important are our earliest years;
The mind, impressible and soft, with ease
Imbibes and copies what she hears and sees,
And through life's labyrinth holds fast the clue
That education gives her, false or true.
Plants raised with tenderness are seldom strong;
Man's coltish disposition asks the thong;
And without discipline, the fav'rite child,
Like a neglected forester, runs wild.[5]
But we, as if good qualities would grow
Spontaneous, take but little pains to sow;
We give some Latin, and a smatch of Greek;
Teach him to fence and figure twice a-week;
And having done, we think, the best we can,
Praise his proficiency, and dub him man.
From school to Cam or Isis, and thence home;
And thence, with all convenient speed, to Rome,
With rev'rend tutor, clad in habit lay,
To tease for cash, and quarrel with all day;
With memorandum book for ev'ry town,
And ev'ry post, and where the chaise broke down;[6]
His stock, a few French phrases got by heart,
With much to learn, but nothing to impart;
The youth, obedient to his sire's commands,
Sets off a wand'rer into foreign lands:
Surprised at all they meet, the gosling pair,
With awkward gait, stretch'd neck, and silly stare,
Discover huge cathedrals built with stone,
And steeples tow'ring high much like our own;
But shew peculiar light by many a grin,
At popish practices observed within.
Ere long, some bowing, smirking, smart abbé,
Remarks two loit'rers that have lost their way,
And being always primed with *politesse*
For men of their appearance and address,
With much compassion undertakes the task,
To tell them more than they have wit to ask;

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Points to inscriptions wheresoe'er they tread,
Such as, when legible, were never read,
But, being canker'd now and half worn out,
Craze antiquarian brains with endless doubt;
Some heedless hero, or some Cæsar shews —
Defective only in his Roman nose;
Exhibits elevations, drawings, plans,
Models of Herculanean pots and pans;
And sells them medals, which, if neither rare
Nor ancient, will be so, preserved with care.
  Strange the recital! from whatever cause
His great improvement and new lights he draws,
The squire, once bashful, is shamefaced no more,
But teems with powers he never felt before:
Whether increased momentum, and the force
With which from clime to clime he sped his course,
As axles sometimes kindle as they go,
Chafed him, and brought dull nature to a glow;
Or whether clearer skies and softer air,
That make Italian flowers so sweet and fair,
Fresh'ning his lazy spirits as he ran,
Unfolded genially and spread the man;
Returning he proclaims by many a grace,
By shrugs and strange contortions of his face,
How much a dunce, that has been sent to roam,
Excels a dunce that has been kept at home.
  Accomplishments have taken virtue's place,
And wisdom falls before exterior grace:
We slight the precious kernel of the stone,
And toil to polish its rough coat alone.
A just deportment, manners graced with ease,
Elegant phrase, and figure form'd to please,
Are qualities, that seem to comprehend
Whatever parents, guardians, schools intend;
Hence an unfurnish'd and a listless mind,
Though busy, trifling; empty, though refined:
Hence all that interferes, and dares to clash
With indolence and luxury, is trash;
While learning, once the man's exclusive pride,
Seems verging fast towards the female side.

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Learning itself, received into a mind
By nature weak, or viciously inclined,
Serves but to lead philosophers astray,
Where children would with ease discern the way.
And of all arts sagacious dupes invent,
To cheat themselves and gain the world's assent,
The worst is, Scripture warp'd from its intent.
  The carriage bowls along, and all are pleased,
If Tom be sober, and the wheels well greased;
But if the rogue have gone a cup too far,
Left out his linchpin, or forgot his tar,
It suffers interruption and delay,
And meets with hindrance in the smoothest way.
When some hypothesis, absurd and vain,
Has fill'd with all its fumes a critic's brain,
The text that sorts not with his darling whim,
Though plain to others, is obscure to him.
The will made subject to a lawless force,
All is irregular and out of course;
And judgment drunk, and bribed to lose his way,
Winks hard, and talks of darkness at noonday.
  A critic on the sacred book should be
Candid and learn'd, dispassionate and free;
Free from the wayward bias bigots feel,
From fancy's influence, and intemp'rate zeal:
But, above all, (or let the wretch refrain
Nor touch the page he cannot but profane,)
Free from the domineering power of lust—
A lewd interpreter is never just.
  How shall I speak thee, or thy power address,
Thou God of our idolatry, the Press?
By thee religion, liberty, and laws,
Exert their influence and advance their cause;
By thee worse plagues than Pharaoh's land befell,
Diffused, make earth the vestibule of hell;
Thou fountain, at which drink the good and wise,
Thou ever bubbling spring of endless lies,
Like Eden's dread probationary tree,
Knowledge of good and evil is from thee.
  No wild enthusiast ever yet could rest,
Till half mankind were like himself possess'd.

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Philosophers, who darken and put out
Eternal truth by everlasting doubt;
Church quacks, with passions under no command,
Who fill the world with doctrines contraband,
Discov'rers of they know not what, confined
Within no bounds—the blind that lead the blind;
To streams of popular opinion drawn,
Deposit in those shallows all their spawn.
The wriggling fry soon fill the creeks around,
Pois'ning the waters where their swarms abound;
Scorn'd by the nobler tenants of the flood,
Minnows and gudgeons gorge th' unwholesome food:
The propagated myriads spread so fast,
E'en Lewenhoeck himself would stand aghast,
Employ'd to calculate th' enormous sum,
And own his crab-computing powers o'ercome.[7]
Is this hyperbole? the world well known,
Your sober thoughts will hardly find it one.
  Fresh confidence the speculatist takes
From every hair-brain'd proselyte he makes,
And therefore prints; himself but half deceived,
Till others have the soothing tale believed.
Hence comment after comment, spun as fine
As bloated spiders draw the flimsy line;
Hence the same word, that bids our lusts obey,
Is misapplied to sanctify their sway.
If stubborn Greek refuse to be his friend,
Hebrew or Syriac shall be forced to bend;
If languages and copies all cry—No—
Somebody proved it centuries ago.
Like trout pursued, the critic in despair
Darts to the mud, and finds his safety there.
Women, whom custom has forbid to fly
The scholar's pitch, (the scholar best knows why,)
With all the simple and unletter'd poor,
Admire his learning, and almost adore:
Whoever errs, the priest can ne'er be wrong,
With such fine words familiar to his tongue.
  Ye ladies! (for, indiff'rent in your cause,
I should deserve to forfeit all applause,)

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Whatever shocks, or gives the least offence
To virtue, delicacy, truth, or sense,
(Try the criterion, 'tis a faithful guide,)
Nor has, nor can have, Scripture on its side.
None but an author knows an author's cares,
Or fancy's fondness for the child she bears.
Committed once into the public arms,
The baby seems to smile with added charms.
Like something precious ventured far from shore,
'Tis valued for the danger's sake the more.
He views it with complacency supreme,
Solicits kind attention to his dream;
And daily more enamour'd of the cheat,
Kneels, and asks Heaven to bless the dear deceit.
So one, whose story serves at least to shew
Men loved their own productions long ago,
Woo'd an unfeeling statue for his wife,
Nor rested till the gods had given it life.[8]
If some mere driv'ler suck the sugar'd fib,
One that still needs his leading string and bib,
And praise his genius, he is soon repaid
In praise applied to the same part—his head:
For tis a rule, that holds for ever true,
Grant me discernment, and I grant it you.
Patient of contradiction as a child,
Affable, humble, diffident, and mild;
Such was Sir Isaac, and such Boyle and Locke:[9]
Your blund'rer is as sturdy as a rock.
The creature is so sure to kick and bite,
A muleteer's the man to set him right.
First appetite inlists him truth's sworn foe,
Then obstinate self-will confirms him so.
Tell him he wanders; that his error leads
To fatal ills; that, though the path he treads
Be flow'ry, and he see no cause of fear,
Death and the pains of hell attend him there:
In vain; the slave of arrogance and pride,
He has no hearing on the prudent side.
His still refuted quirks he still repeats;
New raised objections with new quibbles meets;

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Till, sinking in the quicksand he defends,
He dies disputing, and the contest ends—
But not the mischiefs; they, still left behind,
Like thistle-seeds, are sown by ev'ry wind.
Thus men go wrong with an ingenious skill,
Bend the straight rule to their own crooked will,
And with a clear and shining lamp supplied,
First put it out, then take it for a guide.
Halting on crutches of unequal size,
One leg by truth supported, one by lies,
They sidle to the goal with awkward pace,
Secure of nothing—but to lose the race.
Faults in the life breed errors in the brain,
And these reciprocally those again.
The mind and conduct mutually imprint
And stamp their image in each other's mint:
Each, sire and dam, of an infernal race,
Begetting and conceiving all that 's base.
None sends his arrow to the mark in view,
Whose hand is feeble, or his aim untrue;
For though ere yet the shaft is on the wing,
Or when it first forsakes th' elastic string,
It err but little from th' intended line,
It falls at last far wide of his design:
So he who seeks a mansion in the sky,
Must watch his purpose with a steadfast eye;
That prize belongs to none but the sincere,
The least obliquity is fatal here.
With caution taste the sweet Circean cup;
He that sips often, at last drinks it up.
Habits are soon assumed; but when we strive
To strip them off, 'tis being flay'd alive.
Call'd to the temple of impure delight,
He that abstains, and he alone, does right.
If a wish wander that way, call it home;
He cannot long be safe whose wishes roam.
But, if you pass the threshold, you are caught;
Die then, if power almighty save you not.
There hard'ning by degrees, till double steel'd,
Take leave of Nature's God, and God reveal'd;

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Then laugh at all you trembled at before,
And, joining the freethinkers' brutal roar,
Swallow the two grand nostrums they dispense,—
That Scripture lies, and blasphemy is sense:
If clemency, revolted by abuse,
Be damnable, then damn'd without excuse.
  Some dream that they can silence, when they will,
The storm of passion, and say, "Peace, be still;"
But "Thus far, and no farther," when address'd
To the wild wave, or wilder human breast,
Implies authority that never can,
That never ought to be the lot of man.
  But, Muse, forbear; long flights forebode a fall:
Strike on the deep-toned chord the sum of all.
  Hear the just law—the judgment of the skies!
He that hates truth shall be the dupe of lies:
And he that *will* be cheated to the last,
Delusions strong as hell shall bind him fast.
But if the wand'rer his mistake discern,
Judge his own ways, and sigh for a return,
Bewilder'd once, must he bewail his loss
For ever and for ever? No—the Cross!
There and there only, (though the deist rave,
And atheist, if earth bear so base a slave,)
There, and there only, is the power to save.
There no delusive hope invites despair;
No mockery meets you, no deception there.
The spells and charms, that blinded you before,
All vanish there, and fascinate no more.
  I am no preacher, let this hint suffice,—
The Cross, once seen, is death to every vice:
Else He that hung there suffer'd all his pain,
Bled, groan'd, and agonized, and died, in vain.

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TRUTH.

This poem was partly composed while the Progress of Error still occupied the author's attention, being the second in order of his more extended productions. Its object is so clearly explained in the following extract, that, though from one of the letters already before the reader, it may be here repeated.* "I wrote that poem (Truth) on purpose to inculcate the eleemosynary character of the Gospel, as a dispensation of mercy, in the most absolute sense of the word, to the exclusion of all claims of merit on the part of the receiver; consequently to set the brand of invalidity upon the plea of works, and to discover, upon scriptural ground, the absurdity of that notion, which includes a solecism in the very terms of it, that man, by repentance and good works, may deserve the mercy of his Maker: I call it a solecism, because mercy deserved ceases to be mercy, and must take the name of justice. This is the opinion which I said in my last the world would not acquiesce in; but except this, I do not recollect that I have introduced a syllable into any of my pieces that they can possibly object to; and even this I have endeavoured to deliver from doctrinal dryness, by as many pretty things, in the way of trinket and plaything, as I could muster upon the subject." This obstinacy of a large proportion of mankind, who prefer trusting in their own most imperfect services to confiding, in humble faith, on the full and all-prevailing merits of a Saviour, Cowper farther endeavoured to conciliate by a means which did temporary injury to the cause. His fears on this point gave origin to Newton's preface—the general tone of which, by raising apprehensions of a rude attack upon themselves and their tenets, was calculated to deter such men from the volume altogether. "With respect," writes he, in a private letter, "to the poem

* See Letter 80, Vol. I. page 104.

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called *Truth*, it is *so* true, that it can hardly fail of giving offence to an unenlightened reader. I think, therefore, that in order to obviate in some measure those prejudices that will naturally erect their bristles against it, an explanatory preface, such as you (and nobody so well as you) can furnish me with, will have every grace of propriety to recommend it." Cowper's fears were here, perhaps, too sensitive; but they seem to have been just. The poem is beautiful, yet has hitherto failed in obtaining the general approbation of critics, who pretend that the title raises expectations which are not fulfilled. This, we apprehend, arises from their having mistaken the object; which is not truth in the abstract, but truth as exemplified in a particular Christian doctrine—the insufficiency of works to man's salvation. In this the proper view, the poem is not only complete in its plan, but actually overflows in varied and happy illustration. The Popish anchorite—the Eastern fanatic—the sanctimonious prude—the philosopher and the lace-worker—the "heathen worthies"—the self-righteous and the humble believer before the judgment seat—the efficacy of the Cross,—all tend to enforce the main argument, and all are most finished, some sublime, sketches, considered in themselves, apart from their general propriety of sentiment and place. The poem has farther this high merit, that though treating of a subject decidedly controversial, it is so free from acrimony or partial Christianity, that the pious of either Protestant communion, Lutheran or Calvinist, may peruse it with edification and delight.

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TRUTH.

Pensantur trutinâ.—Hor. Lib. ii. Epist. 1.

Man, on the dubious waves of error toss'd,
His ship half-founder'd, and his compass lost,
Sees, far as human optics may command,
A sleeping fog, and fancies it dry land:
Spreads all his canvass, every sinew plies,
Pants for 't, aims at it, enters it, and dies!
Then farewell all self-satisfying schemes,
His well-built systems, philosophic dreams;
Deceitful views of future bliss, farewell!—
He reads his sentence at the flames of hell.[1]
  Hard lot of man! to toil for the reward
Of virtue, and yet lose it!—Wherefore hard?
He that would win the race must guide his horse
Obedient to the customs of the course;
Else, though unequall'd to the goal he flies,
A meaner than himself shall gain the prize.
Grace leads the right way; if you choose the wrong,
Take it and perish, but restrain your tongue;
Charge not, with light sufficient, and left free,
Your wilful suicide on God's decree.[2]
  Oh, how unlike the complex works of man,
Heaven's easy, artless, unencumber'd plan!
No meretricious graces to beguile,
No clustering ornaments to clog the pile;
From ostentation as from weakness free,
It stands like the cerulean arch we see,
Majestic in his own simplicity.
Inscribed above the portal from afar
Conspicuous as the brightness of a star,
Legible only by the light they give,
Stand the soul-quick'ning words—Believe and live.[3]

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Too many, shock'd at what should charm them most,
Despise the plain direction, and are lost.
Heaven on such terms! they cry with proud disdain,
Incredible, impossible, and vain!—
Rebel, because 'tis easy to obey;
And scorn, for its own sake, the gracious way.
These are the sober, in whose cooler brains
Some thought of immortality remains;
The rest, too busy, or too gay, to wait
On the sad theme, their everlasting state,
Sport for a day, and perish in a night,
The foam upon the waters not so light.

Who judged the Pharisee? What odious cause
Exposed him to the vengeance of the laws?
Had he seduced a virgin, wrong'd a friend,
Or stabb'd a man to serve some private end?
Was blasphemy his sin? Or did he stray
From the strict duties of the sacred day?
Sit long and late at the carousing board?
(Such were the sins with which he charged his Lord.)
No—the man's morals were exact. What then?
'Twas his ambition to be seen of men;
His virtues were his pride; and that one vice
Made all his virtues gewgaws of no price;
He wore them as fine trappings for a show,
A praying, synagogue-frequenting beau.

The self-applauding bird, the peacock, see—
Mark what a sumptuous pharisee is he!
Meridian sunbeams tempt him to unfold
His radiant glories, azure, green, and gold:
He treads as if, some solemn music near,
His measured step were govern'd by his ear:
And seems to say, "Ye meaner fowl, give place;
I am all splendour, dignity, and grace!"

Not so the pheasant on his charms presumes,
Though he too has a glory in his plumes.
He, christianlike, retreats with modest mien
To the close copse, or far sequester'd green,
And shines without desiring to be seen.

The plea of works, as arrogant and vain,
Heaven turns from with abhorrence and disdain;

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Not more affronted by avow'd neglect,
Than by the mere dissembler's feign'd respect.
What is all righteousness that men devise?
What, but a sordid bargain for the skies?
But Christ as soon would abdicate his own,
As stoop from heaven to sell the proud a throne.
His dwelling a recess in some rude rock,
Book, beads, and maple-dish, his meagre stock;
In shirt of hair and weeds of canvass dress'd,
Girt with a bell rope that the Pope has bless'd;
Adust with stripes told out for every crime,
And sore tormented long before his time;
His prayer preferr'd to saints that cannot aid,
His praise postponed, and never to be paid:
See the sage Hermit, by mankind admired,
With all that bigotry adopts inspired,
Wearing out life in his religious whim,
Till his religious whimsy wears out him.[4]
His works, his abstinence, his zeal allow'd,
You think him humble—God accounts him proud;
High in demand, though lowly in pretence,
Of all his conduct this the genuine sense,—
My penitential stripes, my streaming blood,
Have purchased heaven, and prove my title good.
Turn eastward now, and fancy shall apply
To your weak sight her telescopic eye.
The Bramin kindles on his own bare head
The sacred fire, self-torturing his trade;
His voluntary pains, severe and long,
Would give a barb'rous air to British song;
No grand inquisitor could worse invent
Than he contrives, to suffer well content.
Which is the saintlier worthy of the two?
Past all dispute, yon anchorite, say you.
Your sentence and mine differ. What's a name?
I say the bramin has the fairer claim.
If suff'rings Scripture no where recommends,
Devised by self to answer selfish ends,
Give saintship, then all Europe must agree
Ten starvling hermits suffer less than he.

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The truth is, (if the truth may suit your ear,
And prejudice have left a passage clear,)
Pride has attain'd its most luxuriant growth,
And poison'd every virtue in them both.
Pride may be pamper'd while the flesh grows lean;
Humility may clothe an English dean;
That grace was Cowper's—his, confess'd by all—
Though placed in golden Durham's second stall.
Not all the plenty of a bishop's board,
His palace, and his lacqueys, and "My Lord,"
More nourish pride, that condescending vice,
Than abstinence, and beggary, and lice;[5]
It thrives in misery, and abundant grows—
In misery fools upon themselves impose.
But why before us Protestants produce
An Indian mystic, or a French recluse?
Their sin is plain; but what have we to fear,
Reform'd and well instructed? You shall hear.
Yon ancient Prude, whose wither'd features shew
She might be young some forty years ago,
Her elbows pinion'd close upon her hips,
Her head erect, her fan upon her lips,
Her eye-brows arch'd, her eyes both gone astray
To watch yon am'rous couple in their play,
With boney and unkerchief'd neck defies
The rude inclemency of wint'ry skies,
And sails with lappet-head and mincing airs
Duly at clink of bell to morning prayers,
To thrift and parsimony much inclined,
She yet allows herself that boy behind;
The shiv'ring urchin, bending as he goes,
With slipshod heels, and dewdrop at his nose,
His predecessors' coat advanced to wear,
Which future pages yet are doom'd to share,
Carries her Bible tuck'd beneath his arm,
And hides his hands to keep his fingers warm.
She, half an angel in her own account,
Doubts not hereafter with the saints to mount,
Though not a grace appears on strictest search,
But that she fasts, and, item, goes to church.

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Conscious of age, she recollects her youth,
And tells, not always with an eye to truth,
Who spann'd her waist, and who, where'er he came,
Scrawl'd upon glass Miss Bridget's lovely name;
Who stole her slipper, fill'd it with tokay,
And drank the little bumper every day.
Of temper as envenom'd as an asp,
Censorious, and her every word a wasp;
In faithful mem'ry she records the crimes,
Or real or fictitious, of the times;
Laughs at the reputations she has torn,
And holds them dangling at arm's length in scorn.
Such are the fruits of sanctimonious pride,
Of malice fed while flesh is mortified:
Take, madam, the reward of all your prayers,
Where hermits and where bramins meet with theirs;
Your portion is with them—Nay, never frown,
But, if you please, some fathoms lower down.
Artist, attend—your brushes and your paint—
Produce them—take a chair—now, draw a Saint.
Oh, sorrowful and sad! the streaming tears
Channel her cheeks—a Niobe appears!
Is this a saint? Throw tints and all away—
True piety is cheerful as the day;
Will weep indeed, and heave a pitying groan
For others' woes, but smiles upon her own.
What purpose has the King of saints in view?
Why falls the Gospel like a gracious dew?
To call up plenty from the teeming earth,
Or curse the desert with a tenfold dearth?
Is it that Adam's offspring may be saved
From servile fear, or be the more enslaved?
To loose the links that gall'd mankind before,
Or bind them faster on, and add still more?
The freeborn Christian has no chains to prove,
Or, if a chain, the golden one of love:
No fear attends to quench his glowing fires,
What fear he feels, his gratitude inspires.
Shall he, for such deliv'rance freely wrought,
Recompense ill? He trembles at the thought.

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His Master's interest and his own combined
Prompt every movement of his heart and mind:
Thought, word, and deed, his liberty evince,
His freedom is the freedom of a prince.
Man's obligations infinite, of course
His life should prove that he perceives their force;
His utmost he can render is but small—
The principle and motive all in all.
You have two servants—Tom, an arch, sly rogue,
From top to toe the Geta* now in vogue,
Genteel in figure, easy in address,
Moves without noise, and swift as an express,
Reports a message with a pleasing grace,
Expert in all the duties of his place;
Say, on what hinge does his obedience move?
Has he a world of gratitude and love?
No, not a spark—'tis all mere sharper's play;
He likes your house, your housemaid, and your pay;
Reduce his wages, or get rid of her,
Tom quits you, with—Your most obedient, sir.
The dinner served, Charles takes his usual stand,
Watches your eye, anticipates command;
Sighs, if perhaps your appetite should fail;
And if he but suspects a frown, turns pale;
Consults all day your int'rest and your ease,
Richly rewarded if he can but please;
And, proud to make his firm attachment known,
To save your life would nobly risk his own.
Now which stands highest in your serious thought?
Charles, without doubt, say you—and so he ought;
One act, that from a thankful heart proceeds,
Excels ten thousand mercenary deeds.
Thus Heaven approves, as honest and sincere,
The work of gen'rous love and filial fear;
But with averted eyes th' omniscient Judge
Scorns the base hireling and the slavish drudge.
Where dwell these matchless saints?—old Curio cries.
E'en at your side, sir, and before your eyes,
The favour'd few—th' enthusiasts you despise.

* *Geta*, name of a lacquey in Terence.

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And pleased at heart, because on holy ground
Sometimes a canting hypocrite is found,
Reproach a people with his single fall,
And cast his filthy raiment at them all.
Attend!—an apt similitude shall shew
Whence springs the conduct that offends you so.
  See where it smokes along the sounding plain,
Blown all aslant, a driving, dashing rain,[6]
Peel upon peel redoubling all around,
Shakes it again and faster to the ground;
Now flashing wide, now glancing as in play,
Swift beyond thought the lightnings dart away.
Ere yet it came the traveller urged his steed,
And hurried, but with unsuccessful speed;
Now drench'd throughout, and hopeless of his case,
He drops the rein, and leaves him to his pace.
Suppose, unlook'd for in a scene so rude,
Long hid by interposing hill or wood,
Some mansion, neat and elegantly dress'd,
By some kind hospitable heart possess'd,
Offer him warmth, security, and rest;
Think with what pleasure, safe and at his ease,
He hears the tempest howling in the trees,
What glowing thanks his lips and heart employ,
While danger past is turn'd to present joy.—
So fares it with the sinner, when he feels
A growing dread of vengeance at his heels:
His conscience, like a glassy lake before,
Lash'd into foaming waves, begins to roar;
The law, grown clamorous, though silent long,
Arraigns him, charges him with ev'ry wrong,
Asserts the rights of his offended Lord,
And death, or restitution, is the word:
The last impossible, he fears the first,
And, having well deserved, expects the worst.
Then welcome refuge, and a peaceful home;
Oh for a shelter from the wrath to come!
Crush me, ye rocks! ye falling mountains hide,
Or bury me in ocean's angry tide.
The scrutiny of those all-seeing eyes
I dare not—And you need not, God replies;

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The remedy you want I freely give:
The Book shall teach you—read, believe, and live!
'Tis done—the raging storm is heard no more,
Mercy receives him on her peaceful shore;
And Justice, guardian of the dread command,
Drops the red vengeance from his willing hand.
A soul redeem'd demands a life of praise;
Hence the complexion of his future days,
Hence a demeanour holy and unspeck'd,[7]
And the world's hatred, as its sure effect.
Some lead a life unblameable and just,
Their own dear virtue their unshaken trust;
They never sin—or if, as all offend,
Some trivial slips their daily walk attend,
The poor are near at hand, the charge is small,
A slight gratuity atones for all!
For though the Pope has lost his int'rest here,
And pardons are not sold as once they were,
No papist more desirous to compound,
Than some grave sinners upon English ground.
That plea refuted, other quirks they seek—
Mercy is infinite, and man is weak;
The future shall obliterate the past,
And heaven, no doubt, shall be their home at last.
Come then—a still, small whisper in your ear—
He has no hope who never had a fear;
And he that never doubted of his state,
He may, perhaps—perhaps he may—too late.
The path to bliss abounds with many a snare;
Learning is one, and wit, however rare.
The Frenchman, first in literary fame,
(Mention him, if you please. Voltaire? The same)
With spirit, genius, eloquence, supplied,
Lived long, wrote much, laugh'd heartily, and died.
The Scripture was his jest-book, whence he drew
Bon mots to gall the Christian and the Jew;
An infidel in health, but what when sick?
Oh—then a text would touch him at the quick.[8]
View him at Paris in his last career:
Surrounding throngs the demigod revere;

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Exalted on his pedestal of pride,
And fumed with frankincense on ev'ry side,
He begs their flatt'ry with his latest breath,
And smother'd in't at last, is praised to death.
  Yon cottager, who weaves at her own door,
Pillow and bobbins all her little store;
Content though mean, and cheerful if not gay,
Shuffling her threads about the livelong day,
Just earns a scanty pittance, and at night
Lies down secure, her heart and pocket light:
She, for her humble sphere by nature fit,
Has little understanding, and no wit,
Receives no praise; but, though her lot be such,
Toilsome and indigent, she renders much;
Just knows, and knows no more, her Bible true—
A truth the brilliant Frenchman never knew;
And in that charter reads with sparkling eyes
Her title to a treasure in the skies.
  O happy peasant! O unhappy bard!
His the mere tinsel, hers the rich reward;
He praised perhaps for ages yet to come,
She never heard of half a mile from home;
He lost in errors his vain heart prefers,
She safe in the simplicity of hers.
  Not many wise, rich, noble, or profound
In science, win one inch of heavenly ground.
And is it not a mortifying thought
The poor should gain it, and the rich should not?
No—the voluptuaries, who ne'er forget
One pleasure lost, lose heaven without regret:
Regret would rouse them, and give birth to prayer;
Prayer would add faith, and faith would fix them there.
  Not that the Former of us all, in this,
Or aught he does, is govern'd by caprice;
The supposition is replete with sin,
And bears the brand of blasphemy burnt in.
Not so—the silver trumpet's heavenly call
Sounds for the poor, but sounds alike for all:
Kings are invited, and, would kings obey,
No slaves on earth more welcome were than they;

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But royalty, nobility, and state,
Are such a dead preponderating weight,
That endless bliss, (how strange soe'er it seem)
In counterpoise, flies up and kicks the beam.
'Tis open, and ye cannot enter—why?
Because ye will not, Conyers would reply:[9]
And he says much that many may dispute,
And cavil at with ease, but none refute.
O bless'd effect of penury and want;
The seed sown there, how vig'rous is the plant!
No soil like poverty for growth divine,
As leanest land supplies the richest wine.[10]
Earth gives too little, giving only bread,
To nourish pride, or turn the weakest head:
To them the sounding jargon of the schools
Seems what it is—a cap and bells for fools;
The light they walk by, kindled from above,
Shows them the shortest way to life and love;
They, strangers to the controversial field,
Where deists, always foil'd, yet scorn to yield,
And never check'd by what impedes the wise,
Believe, rush forward, and possess the prize.
Envy, ye great, the dull unletter'd small:
Ye have much cause for envy—but not all.
We boast some rich ones whom the Gospel sways,
And one who wears a coronet and prays;
Like gleanings of an olive-tree they show[11]
Here and there one upon the topmost bough.
How readily, upon the Gospel plan,
That question has its answer,—What is man?
Sinful and weak, in every sense a wretch;
An instrument whose chords, upon the stretch,
And strain'd to the last screw that he can bear,
Yield only discord in his Maker's ear:
Once the blest residence of truth divine,
Glorious as Solyma's interior shrine,
Where, in his own oracular abode,
Dwelt visibly the light-creating God;
But made long since, like Babylon of old,
A den of mischiefs never to be told;

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And she, once mistress of the realms around,
Now scatter'd wide, and no where to be found,
As soon shall rise and reascend the throne,
By native power and energy her own,
As Nature, at her own peculiar cost,
Restore to man the glories he has lost.
Go — bid the winter cease to chill the year,
Replace the wand'ring comet in his sphere,
Then boast (but wait for that unhoped-for hour)
The self-restoring arm of human power.
But what is man in his own proud esteem?
Hear him—himself the poet and the theme:
A monarch clothed with majesty and awe,
His mind his kingdom, and his will his law,
Grace in his mien, and glory in his eyes,
Supreme on earth, and worthy of the skies,
Strength in his heart, dominion in his nod,
And, thunderbolts excepted, quite a God!

So sings he, charm'd with his own mind and form,
The song magnificent—the theme a worm!
Himself so much the source of his delight,
His Maker has no beauty in his sight.
See where he sits, contemplative and fix'd,
Pleasure and wonder in his features mix'd;
His passions tamed, and all at his control,
How perfect the composure of his soul!
Complacency has breathed a gentle gale
O'er all his thoughts, and swell'd his easy sail:
His books well trimm'd, and in the gayest style,
Like regimented coxcombs, rank and file;
Adorn his intellects as well as shelves,
And teach him notions splendid as themselves:
The Bible only stands neglected there,
Though that of all most worthy of his care;
And, like an infant troublesome awake,
Is left to sleep for peace and quiet sake.

What shall the man deserve of human kind,
Whose happy skill and industry combined
Shall prove (what argument could never yet)
The Bible an imposture and a cheat?

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The praises of the libertine, profess'd
The worst of men, and curses of the best.
Where should the living, weeping o'er his woes,
The dying, trembling at the awful close,
Where the betray'd, forsaken, and oppress'd,
The thousands whom the world forbids to rest,—
Where should they find, (those comforts at an end
The Scripture yields,) or hope to find, a friend?
Sorrow might muse herself to madness then,
And, seeking exile from the sight of men,
Bury herself in solitude profound,
Grow frantic with her pangs, and bite the ground.
Thus often unbelief, grown sick of life,
Flies to the tempting pool, or felon knife.
The jury meet, the coroner is short,
And lunacy the verdict of the court.
Reverse the sentence, let the truth be known,
Such lunacy is ignorance alone: [12]
They knew not, what some bishops may not know,
That Scripture is the only cure of woe;
That field of promise, how it flings abroad
Its odour o'er the Christian's thorny road!
The soul, reposing on assured relief,
Feels herself happy amidst all her grief,
Forgets her labour as she toils along,
Weeps tears of joy, and bursts into a song.
  But the same word that, like the polish'd share,
Ploughs up the roots of a believer's care,
Kills too the flowery weeds, where'er they grow,
That bind the sinner's bacchanalian brow.
Oh, that unwelcome voice of heavenly love,
Sad messenger of mercy from above!
How does it grate upon his thankless ear,
Crippling his pleasures with the cramp of fear!
His will and judgment at continual strife,
That civil war imbitters all his life:
In vain he points his powers against the skies,
In vain he closes or averts his eyes,
Truth will intrude—she bids him yet beware,
And shakes the sceptic in the scorner's chair.

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Though various foes against the truth combine,
Pride above all opposes her design;
Pride, of a growth superior to the rest,
The subtlest serpent with the loftiest crest,
Swells at the thought, and, kindling into rage,
Would hiss the cherub mercy from the stage.
And is the soul indeed so lost—she cries,
Fall'n from her glory, and too weak to rise;
Torpid and dull beneath a frozen zone,
Has she no spark that may be deem'd her own?
Grant her indebted to what zealots call
Grace undeserved—yet, surely, not for all!
Some beams of rectitude she yet displays,
Some love of virtue, and some power to praise;
Can lift herself above corporeal things,
And, soaring on her own unborrow'd wings,
Possess herself of all that 's good or true,
Assert the skies, and vindicate her due.
Past indiscretion is a venial crime,
And if the youth, unmellow'd yet by time,
Bore on his branch, luxuriant then and rude,
Fruits of a blighted size, austere and crude,
Maturer years shall happier stores produce,
And meliorate the well concocted juice.
Then, conscious of her meritorious zeal,
To justice she may make her bold appeal,
And leave to mercy, with a tranquil mind,
The worthless and unfruitful of mankind.
Hear then how mercy, slighted and defied,
Retorts th' affront against the crown of pride.
Perish the virtue, as it ought, abhorr'd,
And the fool with it, who insults his Lord.
Th' atonement a Redeemer's love has wrought
Is not for you—the righteous need it not.
Seest thou yon harlot, wooing all she meets,
The worn out nuisance of the public streets,
Herself from morn to night, from night to morn,
Her own abhorrence, and as much your scorn:
The gracious shower, unlimited and free,
Shall fall on her, when Heaven denies it thee.

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Of all that wisdom dictates, this the drift,—
That man is dead in sin, and life a gift.[12]
  Is virtue, then, unless of Christian growth,
Mere fallacy, or foolishness, or both?
Ten thousand sages lost in endless woe,
For ignorance of what they could not know?
That speech betrays at once a bigot's tongue—
Charge not a God with such outrageous wrong.
Truly, not I: the partial light men have,
My creed persuades me, well employ'd, may save;
While he that scorns the noonday beam, perverse,
Shall find the blessing, unimproved, a curse.
Let heathen worthies, whose exalted mind
Left sensuality and dross behind,
Possess for me their undisputed lot,
And take unenvied the reward they sought.
But still, in virtue of a Saviour's plea,
Not blind by choice, but destined not to see.
Their fortitude and wisdom were a flame
Celestial, though they knew not whence it came,
Derived from the same source of light and grace,
That guides the Christian in his swifter race;
Their judge was conscience, and her rule their law;
That rule, pursued with rev'rence and with awe,
Led them, however falt'ring, faint, and slow,
From what they knew, to what they wish'd to know.
But let not him that shares a brighter day,
Traduce the splendour of a noontide ray,
Prefer the twilight of a darker time,
And deem his base stupidity no crime:
The wretch, who slights the bounty of the skies,
And sinks, while favour'd with the means to rise,
Shall find them rated at their full amount;
The good he scorn'd all carried to account.
  Marshalling all his terrors as he came,
Thunder, and earthquake, and devouring flame,
From Sinai's top Jehovah gave the law—
Life for obedience, death for every flaw.
When the great Sov'reign would his will express,
He gives a perfect rule—what can he less?

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And guards it with a sanction as severe
As vengeance can inflict, or sinners fear:
Else his own glorious rights he would disclaim,
And man might safely trifle with his name.
He bids him glow with unremitting love
To all on earth, and to himself above;
Condemns th' injurious deed, the slanderous tongue,
The thought that meditates a brother's wrong:
Brings not alone the more conspicuous part —
His conduct — to the test, but tries his heart.
Hark! universal Nature shook and groan'd,
'Twas the last trumpet — see the Judge enthroned;
Rouse all your courage at your utmost need,
Now summon every virtue, stand and plead.
What! silent? Is your boasting heard no more?
That self-renouncing wisdom, learn'd before,
Had shed immortal glories on your brow,
That all your virtues cannot purchase now.
All joy to the believer! He can speak —
Trembling, yet happy; confident, yet meek.
Since the dear hour that brought me to thy foot,
And cut up all my follies by the root,
I never trusted in an arm but thine,
Nor hoped, but in thy righteousness divine;
My prayers and alms, imperfect and defiled,
Were but the feeble efforts of a child;
Howe'er perform'd, it was their brightest part
That they proceeded from a grateful heart;
Cleansed in thine own all purifying blood,
Forgive their evil, and accept their good;
I cast them at thy feet; my only plea
Is what it was, dependence upon thee:
While struggling in the vale of tears below
That never fail'd, nor shall it fail me now.
Angelic gratulations rend the skies:
Pride falls unpitied, never more to rise;
Humility is crown'd, and Faith receives the prize.

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to political discussion, and to the error of assigning more than their due share of importance to contemporary events; hence the introduction of some things which no power can render permanently affecting in poetry. The evanescent interests, however, are happily to a considerable degree incidental, for the general tone and spirit of the poem is an elegant — an impassioned address to men "to turn to the Lord their God," and to educe from all his mercies renewed cause of gratitude and love. These were themes congenial to Cowper's spirit. "So far," says he, "as I have proceeded upon the subject of Expostulation, I have written with tolerable ease to myself, and in my own opinion, (for an opinion I am obliged to have about what I write, whether I will or no,) with more emphasis and energy than in either of the others." The opinion is correct: we find a vigour of language, a copiousness of imagery, a sublimity of Scriptural example, animated throughout by an earnestness of admonition, now fervid, now affecting, and again indignant, which the author never surpassed.

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EXPOSTULATION.

Tantane, tam patiens, nullo certamine tolli
Dona sines? VIRG.

WHY weeps the Muse for England? What appears
In England's case, to move the Muse to tears?
From side to side of her delightful isle
Is she not clothed with a perpetual smile?
Can Nature add a charm, or Art confer
A new found luxury not seen in her?
Where under heaven is pleasure more pursued,
Or where does cold reflection less intrude?
Her fields a rich expanse of wavy corn,
Pour'd out from plenty's overflowing horn;
Ambrosial gardens, in which art supplies
The fervour and the force of Indian skies;
Her peaceful shores, where busy Commerce waits
To pour his golden tide through all her gates;
Whom fiery suns, that scorch the russet spice
Of eastern groves, and oceans floor'd with ice,
Forbid in vain to push his daring way
To darker climes, or climes of brighter day;
Whom the winds waft where'er the billows roll,
From the world's girdle to the frozen pole;
The chariots bounding in her wheel-worn streets,
Her vaults below, where every vintage meets;
Her theatres, her revels, and her sports;
The scenes to which not youth alone resorts,
But age, in spite of weakness and of pain,
Still haunts, in hope to dream of youth again:
All speak her happy; let the Muse look round
From east to west, no sorrow can be found;
Or only what in cottages confined,
Sighs unregarded to the passing wind.

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Then wherefore weep for England? What appears
In England's case to move the Muse to tears?[1]
The prophet wept for Israel, wish'd his eyes
Were fountains fed with infinite supplies:
For Israel dealt in robbery and wrong;
There were the scorner's and the slanderer's tongue;
Oaths, used as playthings or convenient tools,
As interest biass'd knaves, or fashion fools;
Adult'ry neighing at his neighbour's door;
Oppression, lab'ring hard to grind the poor;
The partial balance and deceitful weight,
The treach'rous smile, a mask for secret hate;
Hypocrisy, formality in prayer,
And the dull service of the lip were there.
Her women, insolent and self-caress'd,
By vanity's unwearied finger dress'd,
Forgot the blush, that virgin fears impart
To modest cheeks, and borrow'd one from art;
Were just such trifles, without worth or use,
As silly pride and idleness produce;
Curl'd, scented, furbelow'd, and flounced around,
With feet too delicate to touch the ground,
They stretch'd the neck, and roll'd the wanton eye,
And sigh'd for every fool that flutter'd by.
He saw his people slaves to every lust,
Lewd, avaricious, arrogant, unjust;
He heard the wheels of an avenging God
Groan heavily along the distant road;
Saw Babylon set wide her two-leaved brass
To let the military deluge pass;
Jerusalem a prey, her glory soil'd,
Her princes captive, and her treasures spoil'd;
Wept till all Israel heard his bitter cry,
Stamp'd with his foot, and smote upon his thigh, —
But wept, and stamp'd, and smote his thigh in vain:[2]
Pleasure is deaf when told of future pain,
And sounds prophetic are too rough to suit
Ears long accustom'd to the pleasing lute.
They scorn'd his inspiration and his theme,
Pronounced him frantic, and his fears a dream;

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With self-indulgence wing'd the fleeting hours,
Till the foe found them, and down fell their towers.
Long time Assyria bound them in her chain,
Till penitence had purged the public stain,
And Cyrus, with relenting pity moved,
Return'd them happy to the land they loved;
There, proof against prosperity, a while
They stood the test of her ensnaring smile,
And had the grace in scenes of peace to show
The virtue they had learn'd in scenes of wo.
But man is frail, and can but ill sustain
A long immunity from grief and pain;
And after all the joys that plenty leads,
With tiptoe step vice silently succeeds.
When He that ruled them with a shepherd's rod,
In form a man, in dignity a God,
Came, not expected in that humble guise,
To sift and search them with unerring eyes,
He found, conceal'd beneath a fair outside,
The filth of rottenness and worm of pride;
Their piety a system of deceit,
Scripture employ'd to sanctify the cheat;
The Pharisee the dupe of his own art,
Self-idolized, and yet a knave at heart.
When nations are to perish in their sins,
'Tis in the church the leprosy begins:
The priest, whose office is with zeal sincere
To watch the fountain, and preserve it clear,
Carelessly nods and sleeps upon the brink,
While others poison what the flock must drink;
Or, waking at the call of lust alone,
Infuses lies and errors of his own:
His unsuspecting sheep believe it pure,
And, tainted by the very means of cure,
Catch from each other a contagious spot,
The foul forerunner of a general rot.[a]
Then truth is hush'd, that heresy may preach,
And all is trash that reason cannot teach;
Then God's own image on the soul impress'd
Becomes a mock'ry and a standing jest;

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And faith, the root whence only can arise
The graces of a life that wins the skies,
Loses at once all value and esteem,
Pronounced by graybeards a pernicious dream;
Then ceremony leads her bigots forth,
Prepared to fight for shadows of no worth;
While truths, on which eternal things depend,
Find not, or hardly find, a single friend:
As soldiers watch the signal of command,
They learn to bow, to kneel, to sit, to stand;
Happy to fill religion's vacant place
With hollow form, and gesture, and grimace.
Such, when the Teacher of his Church was there,
People and priest, the sons of Israel were;
Stiff in the letter, lax in the design
And import, of their oracles divine;
Their learning legendary, false, absurd,
And yet exalted above God's own word;
They drew a curse from an intended good,
Puff'd up with gifts they never understood.
He judged them with as terrible a frown,
As if not love, but wrath, had brought him down
Yet he was gentle as soft summer airs,
Had grace for others' sins, but none for theirs;
Through all he spoke a noble plainness ran —
Rhet'ric is artifice, the work of man,
And tricks and turns, that fancy may devise,
Are far too mean for Him that rules the skies.
Th' astonish'd vulgar trembled while he tore
The mask from faces never seen before;
He stripp'd th' impostors in the noonday sun,
Shew'd that they follow'd all they seem'd to shun;
Their pray'rs made public, their excesses kept
As private as the chambers where they slept;
The temple and its holy rites profaned
By mumm'ries He that dwelt in it disdain'd;
Uplifted hands, that at convenient times
Could act extortion and the worst of crimes,
Wash'd with a neatness scrupulously nice,
And free from ev'ry taint but that of vice,

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Judgment, however tardy, mends her pace
When obstinacy once has conquer'd grace.
They saw distemper heal'd, and life restored,
In answer to the fiat of His word;
Confess'd the wonder, and with daring tongue
Blasphemed th' authority from which it sprung.
They knew, by sure prognostics seen on high,
The future tone and temper of the sky;
But, grave dissemblers! could not understand
That sin let loose speaks punishment at hand.

Ask now of history's authentic page,
And call up evidence from every age;
Display with busy and laborious hand
The blessings of the most indebted land;
What nation will you find, whose annals prove
So rich an int'rest in Almighty love?
Where dwell they now, where dwelt in ancient day
A people planted, water'd, blest as they?
Let Egypt's plagues and Canaan's woes proclaim
The favours pour'd upon the Jewish name;
Their freedom purchased for them at the cost
Of all their hard oppressors valued most;
Their title to a country not their own
Made sure by prodigies till then unknown;
For them, the states they left made waste and void,
For them, the states to which they went destroy'd;
A cloud to measure out their march by day,
By night a fire to cheer the gloomy way;
That moving signal summoning when best
Their host to move, and when it stay'd, to rest.
For them the rocks dissolved into a flood,
The dews condensed into angelic food;
Their very garments sacred — old, yet new,
And Time forbid to touch them as he flew;
Streams, swell'd above the bank, enjoin'd to stand,
While they pass'd through to their appointed land;
Their leader arm'd with meekness, zeal, and love,
And graced with clear credentials from above;
Themselves secured beneath th' Almighty wing,
Their God their captain,* lawgiver, and king;

* Vide Joshua, v. 14.

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Crown'd with a thousand vict'ries, and at last
Lords of the conquer'd soil, there rooted fast,
In peace possessing what they won by war,
Their name far publish'd and revered as far;
Where will you find a race like theirs, endow'd
With all that man e'er wished, or Heaven bestow'd?
They, and they only, amongst all mankind,
Received the transcript of th' eternal mind;
Were trusted with his own engraven laws,
And constituted guardians of his cause;
Theirs were the prophets, theirs the priestly call,
And theirs by birth the Saviour of us all.
In vain the nations, that had seen them rise
With fierce and envious yet admiring eyes,
Had sought to crush them, guarded as they were
By power divine, and skill that could not err.
Had they maintain'd allegiance firm and sure,
And kept the faith immaculate and pure,
Then the proud eagles of all-conquering Rome
Had found one city not to be o'ercome;
And the twelve standards of the tribes unfurl'd
Had bid defiance to the warring world.
But grace abused brings forth the foulest deeds,
As richest soil the most luxuriant weeds.
Cured of the golden calves, their fathers' sin,
They set up self, that idol god, within;
View'd a Deliverer with disdain and hate,
Who left them still a tributary state;
Seized fast his hand, held out to set them free
From a worse yoke, and nail'd it to the tree:
There was the consummation and the crown,
The flower of Israel's infamy full blown;
Thence date their sad declension and their fall,
Their woes not yet repeal'd — thence date them all.
Thus fell the best instructed in her day,
And the most favour'd land, look where we may.
Philosophy indeed on Grecian eyes
Had pour'd the day, and clear'd the Roman skies;
In other climes perhaps creative art,
With power surpassing theirs, perform'd her part,

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Might give more life to marble, or might fill
The glowing tablets with a juster skill;[4]
Might shine in fable, and grace idle themes
With all the embroid'ry of poetic dreams:
'Twas theirs alone to dive into the plan
That Truth and Mercy had reveal'd to man;
And while the world beside, that plan unknown,
Deified useless wood or senseless stone,
They breathed in faith their well directed pray'rs,
And the true God, the God of truth, was theirs.
  Their glory faded and their race dispersed,
The last of nations now, though once the first;
They warn and teach the proudest, would they learn,
Keep wisdom, or meet vengeance in your turn:
If we escaped not, if Heaven spared not us,
Peel'd, scatter'd, and exterminated thus;
If vice received her retribution due,
When we were visited, what hope for you?
When God arises with an awful frown
To punish lust or pluck presumption down;
When gifts perverted, or not duly prized,
Pleasure o'ervalued, and his grace despised,
Provoke the vengeance of his righteous hand
To pour down wrath upon a thankless land,
He will be found impartially severe,
Too just to wink, or speak the guilty clear.
  O Israel, of all nations most undone!
Thy diadem displaced, thy sceptre gone;
Thy temple, once thy glory, fall'n and razed,[5]
And thou a worshipper e'en where thou may'st;
Thy services, once holy without spot,
Mere shadows now their ancient pomp forgot;
Thy Levites, once a consecrated host,
No longer Levites, and their lineage lost,
And thou thyself o'er every country sown,
With none on earth that thou canst call thine own;
Cry aloud, thou that sittest in the dust,
Cry to the proud, the cruel, and unjust;
Knock at the gates of nations, rouse their fears;
Say wrath is coming, and the storm appears;
But raise the shrillest cry in British ears.

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What ails thee, restless as the waves that roar,
And fling their foam against thy chalky shore?
Mistress, at least while Providence shall please,
And trident-bearing queen of the wide seas—
Why, having kept good faith, and often shown
Friendship and truth to others, find'st thou none?
Thou that hast set the persecuted free,
None interposes now to succour thee.
Countries indebted to thy power, that shine
With light derived from thee, would smother thine;
Thy very children watch for thy disgrace,
A lawless brood, and curse thee to thy face.[6]
Thy rulers load thy credit, year by year,
With sums Peruvian mines could never clear;
As if, like arches built with skilful hand,
The more 'twere press'd the firmer it would stand.
The cry in all thy ships is still the same,
"Speed us away to battle and to fame."
Thy mariners explore the wild expanse,
Impatient to descry the flags of France;
But, though they fight as thine have ever fought,
Return ashamed, without the wreaths they sought.[7]
Thy senate is a scene of civil jar,
Chaos of contrarieties at war;
Where sharp and solid, phlegmatic and light,
Discordant atoms meet, ferment, and fight;
Where obstinacy takes his sturdy stand,
To disconcert what policy has plann'd;
Where policy is busied all night long
In setting right what faction has set wrong;
Where flails of oratory thrash the floor,
That yields them chaff and dust, and nothing more.
Thy rack'd inhabitants repine, complain,
Tax'd till the brow of labour sweats in vain;
War lays a burden on the reeling state,
And peace does nothing to relieve the weight;
Successive loads succeeding broils impose,
And sighing millions prophesy the close.[8]
Is adverse Providence, when ponder'd well,
So dimly writ, or difficult to spell,

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Thou canst not read with readiness and ease
Providence adverse in events like these?
Know, then, that heavenly wisdom on this ball
Creates, gives birth to, guides, consummates all;
That, while laborious and quick thoughted man
Snuffs up the praise of what he seems to plan,
He first conceives, then perfects his design,
As a mere instrument in hands divine:
Blind to the working of that secret power,
That balances the wings of ev'ry hour,
The busy trifler dreams himself alone,
Frames many a purpose, and God works his own.
States thrive or wither as moons wax and wane,
E'en as His will and His decrees ordain:
While honour, virtue, piety, bear sway,
They flourish; and, as these decline, decay:
In just resentment of His injured laws,
He pours contempt on them and on their cause;
Strikes the rough thread of error right athwart
The web of ev'ry scheme they have at heart;
Bids rottenness invade and bring to dust
The pillars of support, in which they trust,
And do his errand of disgrace and shame
On the chief strength and glory of the frame.
None ever yet impeded what He wrought,
None bars Him out from his most secret thought;
Darkness itself before his eye is light,
And Hell's close mischief naked in His sight.
Stand now and judge thyself: Hast thou incurr'd
His anger, who can waste thee with a word,
Who poises and proportions sea and land,
Weighing them in the hollow of His hand,
And in whose awful sight all nations seem
As grasshoppers, as dust, a drop, a dream?
Hast thou (a sacrilege His soul abhors)
Claim'd all the glory of thy prosp'rous wars?
Proud of thy fleets and armies, stolen the gem
Of His just praise to lavish it on them?
Hast thou not learn'd, what thou art often told,
A truth still sacred, and believed of old,

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That no success attends on spears and swords
Unblest, and that the battle is the Lord's?
That Courage is His creature; and Dismay
The post, that at His bidding speeds away,
Ghastly in feature, and his stamm'ring tongue
With doleful rumour and sad presage hung,
To quell the valour of the stoutest heart,
And teach the combatant a woman's part?
That He bids thousands fly when none pursue,
Saves as He will by many or by few,
And claims for ever, as His royal right,
The event, and sure decision of the fight.

Hast thou, though suckled at fair freedom's breast,
Exported slav'ry to the conquer'd East?
Pull'd down the tyrants India served with dread,
And raised thyself, a greater, in their stead?
Gone thither arm'd and hungry, return'd full,
Fed from the richest veins of the Mogul,
A despot big with power obtain'd by wealth,
And that obtain'd by rapine and by stealth?
With Asiatic vices stored thy mind,
But left their virtues and thine own behind?
And, having truck'd thy soul, brought home the fee,
To tempt the poor to sell himself to thee?

Hast thou by statute shoved from its design
The Saviour's feast, his own blest bread and wine,
And made the symbols of atoning grace
An office key, a picklock to a place,
That infidels may prove their title good
By an oath dipp'd in sacramental blood?
A blot that will be still a blot, in spite
Of all that grave apologists may write;
And though a bishop toil to cleanse the stain,
He wipes and scours the silver cup in vain.
And hast thou sworn on every slight pretence,
Till perjuries are common as bad pence,
While thousands, careless of the damning sin,
Kiss the book's outside, who ne'er look within?[9]

Hast thou, when Heaven has clothed thee with disgrace,
And, long provoked, repaid thee to thy face,

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(For thou hast known eclipses, and endured
Dimness and anguish, all thy beams obscured,
When sin has shed dishonour on thy brow
And never of a sabler hue than now,)
Hast thou, with heart perverse and conscience sear'd,
Despising all rebuke, still persevered,
And having chosen evil, scorn'd the voice
That cried, "Repent," and gloried in thy choice?
Thy fastings, when calamity at last
Suggests th' expedient of a yearly fast,
What mean they? Canst thou dream there is a power
In lighter diet, at a later hour,
To charm to sleep the threat'ning of the skies,
And hide past folly from all-seeing eyes?
The fast, that wins deliverance, and suspends
The stroke that a vindictive * God intends,
Is to renounce hypocrisy; to draw
Thy life upon the pattern of the law;
To war with pleasure, idolized before;
To vanquish lust, and wear its yoke no more.
All fasting else, whate'er be the pretence,
Is wooing mercy by renew'd offence.
  Hast thou within thee sin, that in old time
Brought fire from heaven, the sex-abusing crime,
Whose horrid perpetration stamps disgrace,
Baboons are free from, upon human race?
Think on the fruitful and well water'd spot,
That fed the flocks and herds of wealthy Lot,
Where Paradise seem'd still vouchsafed on earth,
Burning and scorch'd into perpetual dearth,
Or, in his words who damn'd the base desire,
Suff'ring the vengeance of eternal fire:
Then Nature, injured, scandalized, defiled,
Unveil'd her blushing cheek, look'd on and smiled;
Beheld with joy the lovely scene defaced,
And praised the wrath that laid her beauties waste.

Vindictive is here used in the sense of "avenging," "justifying"—an application of the word not warranted by common usage, though not contrary to its derivative import.

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Far be the thought from any verse of mine,
And farther still the form'd and fix'd design,
To thrust the charge of deeds that I detest,
Against an innocent, unconscious breast:
The man that dares traduce, because he can
With safety to himself, is not a man:
An individual is a sacred mark,
Not to be pierced in play, or in the dark;
But public censure speaks a public foe,
Unless a zeal for virtue guide the blow.[10]

The priestly brotherhood, devout, sincere,
From mean self-int'rest and ambition clear,
Their hope in Heaven, servility their scorn,
Prompt to persuade, expostulate, and warn,
Their wisdom pure, and given them from above,
Their usefulness ensured by zeal and love,
As meek as the man Moses, and withal
As bold as in Agrippa's presence Paul,
Should fly the world's contaminating touch,
Holy and unpolluted,—are thine such?
Except a few with Eli's spirit blest,
Hophni and Phineas may describe the rest.[11]

Where shall a teacher look, in days like these,
For ears and hearts that he can hope to please?
Look to the poor—the simple and the plain
Will hear perhaps thy salutary strain:
Humility is gentle, apt to learn,
Speak but the word, will listen and return.
Alas! not so; the poorest of the flock
Are proud, and set their faces as a rock;
Denied that earthly opulence they choose,
God's better gift they scoff at and refuse.
The rich, the produce of a nobler stem,
Are more intelligent at least—try them.
O vain inquiry! they without remorse
Are altogether gone a devious course;
Where beck'ning pleasure leads them wildly stray;
Have burst the bands, and cast the yoke away.

Now, borne upon the wings of truth sublime,
Review thy dim original and prime.

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This island, spot of unreclaim'd rude earth,
The cradle that received thee at thy birth
Was rock'd by many a rough Norwegian blast,
And Danish howlings scared thee as they pass'd;
For thou wast born amid the din of arms,
And suck'd a breast that panted with alarms.
While yet thou wast a grov'ling puling chit,
Thy bones not fashion'd, and thy joints not knit,
The Roman taught thy stubborn knee to bow,
Though twice a Cæsar could not bend thee now:
His victory was that of orient light,
When the sun's shafts disperse the gloom of night.
Thy language at this distant moment shows
How much the country to the conqu'ror owes;
Expressive, energetic, and refined,
It sparkles with the gems he left behind:[12]
He brought thy land a blessing when he came,
He found thee savage, and he left thee tame;
Taught thee to clothe thy pink'd and painted hide,
And grace thy figure with a soldier's pride;
He sow'd the seeds of order where he went,
Improved thee far beyond his own intent,
And, while he ruled thee by the sword alone,
Made thee at last a warrior like his own.[13]
Religion, if in heavenly truths attired:
Needs only to be seen to be admired;
But thine, as dark as witcheries of the night,
Was form'd to harden hearts and shock the sight;
Thy Druids struck the well-hung harps they bore
With fingers deeply dyed in human gore;
And, while the victim slowly bled to death,
Upon the rolling chords rung out his dying breath.
  Who brought the lamp, that with awaking beams
Dispell'd thy gloom, and broke away thy dreams,
Tradition, now decrepid and worn out,
Babbler of ancient fables, leaves a doubt;
But still light reach'd thee; and those gods of thine,
Woden and Thor, each tott'ring in his shrine,
Fell broken and defaced at their own door,
As Dagon in Philistia long before.

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But Rome, with sorceries and magic wand,
Soon raised a cloud that darken'd every land;
And thine was smother'd in the stench and fog
Of Tiber's marshes and the papal bog.
Then priests, with bulls and briefs, and shaven crowns,
And griping fists, and unrelenting frowns,
Legates and delegates, with powers from hell,
Though heavenly in pretension, fleeced thee well:
And to this hour, to keep it fresh in mind,
Some twigs of that old scourge are left behind. *
Thy soldiery, the Pope's well-managed pack,
Were train'd beneath his lash, and knew the smack,
And, when he laid them on the scent of blood,
Would hunt a Saracen through fire and flood.
Lavish of life, to win an empty tomb,
That proved a mint of wealth, a mine to Rome,
They left their bones beneath unfriendly skies,
His worthless absolution all the prize!
Thou wast the veriest slave in days of yore,
That ever dragg'd a chain or tugg'd an oar.
Thy monarchs, arbitrary, fierce, unjust,
Themselves the slaves of bigotry or lust,
Disdain'd thy counsels; only in distress
Found thee a goodly sponge for power to press.
Thy chiefs, the lords of many a petty fee,
Provoked and harass'd, in return plagued thee;
Call'd thee away from peaceable employ,
Domestic happiness and rural joy,
To waste thy life in arms, or lay it down
In causeless feuds and bick'rings of their own.
Thy parliaments adored on bended knees
The sov'reignty they were convened to please;
Whate'er was ask'd, too timid to resist,
Complied with, and were graciously dismiss'd;
And if some Spartan soul a doubt express'd,
And, blushing at the tameness of the rest,
Dared to suppose the subject had a choice,
He was a traitor by the gen'ral voice.
O slave! with powers thou didst not dare exert,
Verse cannot stoop so low as thy desert;

* Which may be found at Doctors' Commons.—*Author's Note.*

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It shakes the sides of splenetic disdain,
Thou self-entitled ruler of the main,
To trace thee to the date when yon fair sea,
That clips thy shores, had no such charms for thee;
When other nations flew from coast to coast,
And thou hadst neither fleet nor flag to boast.
  Kneel now, and lay thy forehead in the dust;
Blush, if thou canst—not petrified, thou must;
Act but an honest and a faithful part;
Compare what then thou wast with what thou art;
And God's disposing providence confess'd,
Obduracy itself must yield the rest:
Then thou art bound to serve him, and to prove,
Hour after hour, thy gratitude and love.
  Has he not hid thee, and thy favour'd land,
For ages safe beneath his shelt'ring hand,
Given thee his blessing on the clearest proof,
Bid nations leagued against thee stand aloof,
And charged hostility and hate to roar
Where else they would, but not upon thy shore?
His power secured thee, when presumptuous Spain
Baptized her fleet Invincible in vain;
Her gloomy monarch, doubtful and resign'd
To ev'ry pang that racks an anxious mind,
Ask'd of the waves, that broke upon his coast,
What tidings? and the surge replied—All lost!
And when the Stuart, leaning on the Scot,
Then too much fear'd, and now too much forgot,
Pierced to the very centre of the realm,
And hoped to seize his abdicated helm,
'Twas but to prove how quickly with a frown
He that had raised thee could have pluck'd thee down.
Peculiar is the grace by thee possess'd,
Thy foes implacable, thy land at rest;
Thy thunders travel over earth and seas,
And all at home is pleasure, wealth, and ease.
'Tis thus, extending his tempestuous arm,
Thy Maker fills the nations with alarm,
While his own heaven surveys the troubled scene,
And feels no change, unshaken and serene.

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Freedom, in other lands scarce known to shine,
Pours out a flood of splendour upon thine;
Thou hast as bright an int'rest in her rays
As ever Roman had in Rome's best days.
True freedom is where no restraint is known
That Scripture, justice, and good sense disown,
Where only vice and injury are tied,
And all from shore to shore is free beside.
Such freedom is—and Windsor's hoary towers
Stood trembling at the boldness of thy powers,
That won a nymph on that immortal plain
Like her the fabled Phœbus woo'd in vain:
He found the laurel only—happier you,
Th' unfading laurel, and the virgin too! *

Now think, if pleasure have a thought to spare;
If God himself be not beneath her care;
If business, constant as the wheels of time,
Can pause an hour to read a serious rhyme;
If the new mail thy merchants now receive,
Or expectation of the next, give leave:
Oh think! if chargeable with deep arrears,
For such indulgence gilding all thy years,
How much, though long neglected, shining yet,
The beams of heavenly truth have swell'd the debt.
When persecuting zeal made royal sport
With tortured innocence in Mary's court,
And Bonner, blithe as shepherd at a wake,
Enjoy'd the show, and danced about the stake;
The sacred book, its value understood,
Received the seal of martyrdom in blood.
Those holy men, so full of truth and grace,
Seem to reflection of a diff'rent race:
Meek, modest, venerable, wise, sincere,
In such a cause they could not dare to fear;
They could not purchase earth with such a prize,
Or spare a life too short to reach the skies.

* Alluding to the grant of Magna Charta, which was extorted from King John by the barons at Runnymede near Windsor.—*Author's Note.*—[The mythological allusion is to Apollo's vain pursuit of Daphne.

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From them to thee convey'd along the tide,
Their streaming hearts pour'd freely when they died;
Those truths, which neither use nor years impair,
Invite thee, woo thee, to the bliss they share.
What dotage will not vanity maintain?
What web too weak to catch a modern brain?
The moles and bats in full assembly find,
On special search, the keen eyed eagle blind.
And did they dream, and art thou wiser now?
Prove it — if better, I submit and bow.
Wisdom and goodness are twin born, one heart
Must hold both sisters, never seen apart.
So then — as darkness overspread the deep,
Ere Nature rose from her eternal sleep,
And this delightful earth, and that fair sky,
Leap'd out of nothing, call'd by the Most High;
By such a change thy darkness is made light,
Thy chaos order, and thy weakness might;
And He, whose power mere nullity obeys,
Who found thee nothing, form'd thee for His praise.
To praise Him is to serve Him, and fulfil,
Doing and suff'ring, His unquestion'd will;
'Tis to believe what men inspired of old,
Faithful, and faithfully inform'd, unfold;
Candid and just, with no false aim in view,
To take for truth what cannot but be true;
To learn in God's own school the Christian part,
And bind the task assign'd thee to thine heart:
Happy the man there seeking and there found,
Happy the nation where such men abound.

How shall a verse impress thee? by what name
Shall I adjure thee not to court thy shame?
By theirs, whose bright example, unimpeach'd,
Directs thee to that eminence they reach'd,
Heroes and worthies of days past, thy sires?
Or His, who touch'd their hearts with hallow'd fires?
Their names, alas! in vain reproach an age
Whom all the vanities they scorn'd engage!
And His, that seraphs tremble at, is hung
Disgracefully on ev'ry trifler's tongue,

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Or serves the champion in forensic war
To flourish and parade with at the bar.
Pleasure herself perhaps suggests a plea,
If int'rest move thee, to persuade e'en thee;
By ev'ry charm that smiles upon her face,
By joys possess'd, and joys still held in chase,
If dear society be worth a thought,
And if the feast of freedom cloy thee not,
Reflect that these, and all that seems thine own,
Held by the tenure of His will alone,
Like angels in the service of their Lord,
Remain with thee, or leave thee at His word;
That gratitude and temp'rance in our use
Of what He gives, unsparing and profuse,
Secure the favour, and enhance the joy,
That thankless waste and wild abuse destroy.
But above all reflect—how cheap soe'er
Those rights, that millions envy thee, appear,
And, though resolved to risk them, and swim down
The tide of pleasure, heedless of His frown—
That blessings truly sacred, and when given
Mark'd with the signature and stamp of Heaven,
The word of prophecy, those truths divine,
Which make that heaven, if thou desire it, thine,
(Awful alternative! believed, beloved,
Thy glory; and thy shame, if unimproved,)
Are never long vouchsafed, if push'd aside
With cold disgust, or philosophic pride!
And that, judicially withdrawn, disgrace,
Error, and darkness, occupy their place.
A world is up in arms,[14] and thou, a spot
Not quickly found if negligently sought,
Thy soul as ample as thy bounds are small,
Endurest the brunt, and darest defy them all:
And wilt thou join to this bold enterprise
A bolder still, a contest with the skies?
Remember, if He guard thee and secure,
Whoe'er assails thee, thy success is sure;
But if He leave thee, though the skill and power
Of nations, sworn to spoil thee and devour,

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Were all collected in thy single arm,
And thou could'st laugh away the fear of harm,
That strength would fail, opposed against the push
And feeble onset of a pigmy rush.
Say not (and if the thought of such defence
Should spring within thy bosom, drive it thence)
What nation amongst all my foes is free
From crimes as base as any charged on me?
Their measure fill'd, they too shall pay the debt,
Which God, though long forborne, will not forget;
But know that wrath divine, when most severe,
Makes justice still the guide of his career,
And will not punish, in one mingled crowd,
Them without light, and thee without a cloud.

Muse, hang this harp upon yon aged beech,
Still murm'ring with the solemn truths I teach;
And while at intervals a cold blast sings
Through the dry leaves, and pants upon the strings;
My soul shall sigh in secret, and lament
A nation scourged, yet tardy to repent.
I know the warning song is sung in vain,
That few will hear, and fewer heed the strain;
But if a sweeter voice, and one design'd
A blessing to my country and mankind,
Reclaim the wand'ring thousands, and bring home
A flock so scatter'd, and so wont to roam,
Then place it once again between my knees;
The sound of truth will then be sure to please:
And truth alone, where'er my life be cast,
In scenes of plenty, or the pining waste,
Shall be my chosen theme, my glory to the last.

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HOPE.

The original manuscript of this poem received the finishing touches on the 23d of June, 1781. It was found that the plan of the volume sketched in the preceding notice could not be carried into effect. "The season of publication," writes the poet in May, "is just elapsed. The town is going into the country every day, and my book cannot appear till they return; that is to say, not till next winter." Before that time arrived, Cowper had added to his former compositions the new contributions of Hope, and the three succeeding poems. The truths which it is here the object to inculcate are epitomized in the following beautiful lines of Watts, —

> Vain are the hopes the sons of men
> Upon their works have built;
> Their hearts by nature are unclean,
> Their actions full of guilt.

In its prevailing sentiment, therefore, the composition resembles its predecessor Truth. The two poems, however, are essentially distinct in their modes of treating the same subject. Truth is more didactic, Hope more persuasive; the former explaining the doctrine, the latter illustrating the practice, how man

> —— may nourish and secure
> His new-born virtues, and preserve him pure.

The language of Hope, though less impassioned than in Expostulation, is more uniformly elegant than that of any of the preceding pieces; and altogether the composition is a most pleasing one. Its Christianity is pure, and while strictly evangelical, it breathes a spirit of gentleness, and meekness, and peace.

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HOPE.

..... doceas iter, et sacra ostia pandas.—Virg. Æn. vi. 109.

Ask what is human life — the sage replies,
With disappointment low'ring in his eyes,
A painful passage o'er a restless flood,
A vain pursuit of fugitive false good,
A scene of fancied bliss and heartfelt care,
Closing at last in darkness and despair:
The poor, inured to drudgery and distress,
Act without aim, think little, and feel less,
And no where, but in feign'd Arcadian scenes,
Taste happiness, or know what pleasure means.
Riches are pass'd away from hand to hand,
As fortune, vice, or folly, may command;
As in a dance the pair that take the lead
Turn downward, and the lowest pair succeed,
So shifting and so various is the plan,
By which Heaven rules the mix'd affairs of man;
Vicissitude wheels round the motley crowd,
The rich grow poor, the poor become purse-proud;
Bus'ness is labour, and man's weakness such,
Pleasure is labour too, and tires as much;
The very sense of it foregoes its use,
By repetition pall'd, by age obtuse.
Youth lost in dissipation we deplore,
Through life's sad remnant, what no sighs restore;
Our years, a fruitless race without a prize,
Too many, yet too few to make us wise.
  Dangling his cane about, and taking snuff,
Lothario cries, What philosophic stuff!
O querulous and weak! whose useless brain
Once thought of nothing, and now thinks in vain;
Whose eye reverted weeps o'er all the past,
Whose prospect shews thee a disheart'ning waste;

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Would age in thee resign his wintry reign,
And youth invigorate that frame again,
Renew'd desire would grace with other speech
Joys always prized when placed within our reach.
For lift thy palsied head, shake off the gloom
That overhangs the borders of thy tomb.
See Nature, gay as when she first began,
With smiles alluring her admirer, man;
She spreads the morning over eastern hills,
Earth glitters with the drops the night distils;
The sun obedient at her call appears,
To fling his glories o'er the robe she wears;
Banks clothed with flow'rs, groves fill'd with sprightly sounds,
The yellow tilth,* green meads, rocks, rising grounds,
Streams edged with osiers, fatt'ning ev'ry field
Where'er they flow, now seen and now conceal'd
From the blue rim where skies and mountains meet,
Down to the very turf beneath thy feet,
Ten thousand charms, that only fools despise,
Or pride can look at with indiff'rent eyes,
All speak one language, all with one sweet voice
Cry to her universal realm, Rejoice!
Man feels the spur of passions and desires,
And she gives largely more than he requires;
Not that, his hours devoted all to care,
Hollow-eyed abstinence, and lean despair,
The wretch may pine, while to his smell, taste, sight,
She holds a paradise of rich delight;
But gently to rebuke his awkward fear,
To prove that what she gives, she gives sincere;
To banish hesitation, and proclaim
His happiness, her dear, her only aim.
Tis grave philosophy's absurdest dream,
That Heaven's intentions are not what they seem,
That only shadows are dispensed below,
And earth has no reality but wo.
Thus things terrestrial wear a diff'rent hue,
As youth or age persuades; and neither true.

* Cultivated fields, from *till*, an extension of the original import,
Give fallow lands their seasons and their tilth.
DRAYTON'S *Polyalbion*.

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So Flora's wreath through colour'd crystal seen,
The rose or lily appears blue or green,
But still th' imputed tints are those alone
The medium represents, and not their own.
  To rise at noon, sit slipshod and undress'd,
To read the news, or fiddle, as seems best,
Till half the world comes rattling at his door,
To fill the dull vacuity till four;
And, just when ev'ning turns the blue vault gray,
To spend two hours in dressing for the day;
To make the sun a bauble without use,
Save for the fruits his heavenly beams produce;
Quite to forget, or deem it worth no thought,
Who bids him shine, or if he shine or not;
Through mere necessity to close his eyes
Just when the larks and when the shepherds rise;
Is such a life, so tediously the same,
So void of all utility or aim,
That poor JONQUIL, with almost every breath
Sighs for his exit, vulgarly call'd death:
For he, with all his follies, has a mind
Not yet so blank, or fashionably blind,
But now and then perhaps a feeble ray
Of distant wisdom shoots across his way,
By which he reads, that life without a plan,
As useless as the moment it began,
Serves merely as a soil for discontent
To thrive in—an encumbrance ere half spent.
Oh, weariness beyond what asses feel,
That tread the circuit of the cistern wheel;
A dull rotation, never at a stay,
Yesterday's face twin-image of to-day;
While conversation, an exhausted stock,
Grows drowsy as the clicking of a clock.
No need, he cries, of gravity stuff'd out
With academic dignity devout,
To read wise lectures—vanity the text!
Proclaim the remedy, ye learned, next;
For truth self-evident, with pomp impress'd,
Is vanity surpassing all the rest.

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That remedy, not hid in deeps profound,
Yet seldom sought where only to be found,
While passion turns aside from its due scope
Th' inquirer's aim — that remedy is HOPE.
Life is His gift, from whom whate'er life needs,
With ev'ry good and perfect gift, proceeds;
Bestow'd on man, like all that we partake,
Royally, freely, for His bounty's sake;
Transient indeed, as is the fleeting hour,
And yet the seed of an immortal flower;
Design'd in honour of his endless love,
To fill with fragrance his abode above;
No trifle, howsoever short it seem,
And, howsoever shadowy, no dream;
Its value, what no thought can ascertain,
Nor all an angel's eloquence explain.

Men deal with life as children with their play,
Who first misuse, then cast their toys away;
Live to no sober purpose, and contend
That their Creator had no serious end.
When God and man stand opposite in view,
Man's disappointment must of course ensue.
The just Creator condescends to write,
In beams of inextinguishable light,
His names of wisdom, goodness, power, and love,
On all that blooms below, or shines above;
To catch the wand'ring notice of mankind,
And teach the world, if not perversely blind,
His gracious attributes, and prove the share
His offspring hold in his paternal care.
If, led from earthly things to things divine,
His creature thwart not his august design,
Then praise is heard instead of reasoning pride,
And captious cavil and complaint subside.
Nature, employ'd in her allotted place,
Is handmaid to the purposes of Grace;
By good vouchsafed makes known superior good,
And bliss not seen, by blessings understood:
That bliss, reveal'd in Scripture, with a glow
Bright as the covenant-ensuring bow,

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Fires all his feelings with a noble scorn
Of sensual evil, and thus HOPE is born.
  HOPE sets the stamp of vanity on all
That men have deem'd substantial since the fall,
Yet has the wondrous virtue to educe
From emptiness itself a real use;
And while she takes, as at a father's hand,
What health and sober appetite demand,
From fading good derives, with chymic art,
That lasting happiness, a thankful heart.
Hope, with uplifted foot, set free from earth,
Pants for the place of her ethereal birth,
On steady wings sails through th' immense abyss,
Plucks amaranthine joys from bowers of bliss,
And crowns the soul, while yet a mourner here,
With wreaths like those triumphant spirits wear.
Hope, as an anchor firm and sure, holds fast
The Christian vessel, and defies the blast.
Hope! nothing else can nourish and secure
His new-born virtues, and preserve him pure.
Hope! let the wretch, once conscious of the joy,
Whom now despairing agonies destroy,
Speak, for he can, and none so well as he,
What treasures centre, what delights, in thee.
Had he the gems, the spices, and the land
That boasts the treasure, all at his command;
The fragrant grove, th' inestimable mine,
Were light, when weigh'd against one smile of thine.
  Though clasp'd and cradled in his nurse's arms,
He shine with all a cherub's artless charms,
Man is the genuine offspring of revolt,
Stubborn and sturdy, a wild ass's colt;
His passions, like the wat'ry stores that sleep
Beneath the smiling surface of the deep,
Wait but the lashes of a wintry storm,
To frown and roar, and shake his feeble form.
From infancy through childhood's giddy maze,
Froward at school, and fretful in his plays,
The puny tyrant burns to subjugate
The free republic of the whip-gig state.

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If one, his equal in athletic frame,
Or, more provoking still, of nobler name,
Dare step across his arbitrary views,
An Iliad, only not in verse, ensues:
The little Greeks look trembling at the scales,
Till the best tongue or heaviest hand prevails.
  Now see him lanch'd into the world at large;
If priest, supinely droning o'er his charge,
Their fleece his pillow, and his weekly drawl,
Though short, too long, the price he pays for all:
If lawyer, loud, whatever cause he plead,
But proudest of the worst if that succeed:
Perhaps a grave physician, gath'ring fees,
Punctually paid for length'ning out disease;
No COTTON, whose humanity sheds rays,
That make superior skill his second praise:
If arms engage him, he devotes to sport
His date of life, so likely to be short;
A soldier may be any thing, if brave,
So may a tradesman, if not quite a knave.
Such stuff the world is made of; and mankind
To passion, int'rest, pleasure, whim resign'd,
Insist on, as if each were his own pope,
Forgiveness, and the privilege of hope.
But Conscience, in some awful silent hour,
When captivating lusts have lost their power —
Perhaps when sickness, or some fearful dream,
Reminds him of religion, hated theme!—
Starts from the down on which he lately slept,
And tells of laws despised, at least not kept;
Shews with a pointing finger, but no noise,
A pale procession of past sinful joys,
All witnesses of blessings foully scorn'd,
And life abused, and not to be suborn'd:
Mark these, she says; these summon'd from afar,
Begin their march to meet thee at the bar;
There find a Judge inexorably just,
And perish there, as all presumption must,
  Peace be to those — such peace as earth can give —,
Who live in pleasure, dead e'en while they live;

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Born capable indeed of heavenly truth,
But down to latest age, from earliest youth,
Their mind a wilderness through want of care,
The plough of wisdom never entering there.
Peace (if insensibility may claim
A right to the meek honours of her name)
To men of pedigree, their noble race,
Emulous always of the nearest place
To any throne, except the throne of grace:
(Let cottagers and unenlighten'd swains
Revere the laws they dream that Heaven ordains,
Resort on Sundays to the house of prayer,
And ask, and fancy they find, blessings there.)
Themselves, perhaps, when weary they retreat
T' enjoy cool Nature in a country seat,
T' exchange the centre of a thousand trades,
For clumps, and lawns, and temples, and cascades;
May now and then their velvet cushions take,
And seem to pray for good example's sake;
Judging, in charity no doubt, the town
Pious enough, and having need of none.
Kind souls! to teach their tenantry to prize
What they themselves, without remorse, despise:
Nor hope have they, nor fear, of aught to come,
As well for them had prophecy been dumb;
They could have held the conduct they pursue,
Had Paul of Tarsus lived and died a Jew;
And truth, proposed to reas'ners wise as they,
Is a pearl cast—completely cast away.
They die—Death lends them, pleased, and as in sport,
All the grim honours of his ghastly court.
Far other paintings grace the chamber now,
Where late we saw the mimic landscape glow:
The busy heralds hang the sable scene
With mournful 'scutcheons, and dim lamps between;
Proclaim their titles to the crowd around,
But they that wore them move not at the sound;
The coronet, placed idly at their head,
Adds nothing now to the degraded dead;
And e'en the star that glitters on the bier,
Can only say,—Nobility lies here.

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Peace to all such—'twere pity to offend,
By useless censure, whom we cannot mend;
Life without hope can close but in despair,
'Twas there we found them, and must leave them there.
As, when two pilgrims in a forest stray,
Both may be lost, yet each in his own way;
So fares it with the multitudes beguiled
In vain opinion's waste and dangerous wild;
Ten thousand rove the brakes and thorns among;
Some eastward, and some westward, and all wrong,
But here, alas! the fatal diff'rence lies,—
Each man's belief is right in his own eyes;
And he that blames what they have blindly chose
Incurs resentment for the love he shows.
Say, botanist, within whose province fall
The cedar and the hyssop on the wall,
Of all that deck the lanes, the fields, the bow'rs,
What parts the kindred tribes of weeds and flow'rs?
Sweet scent, or lovely form, or both combined,
Distinguish ev'ry cultivated kind;
The want of both denotes a meaner breed,
And Chloe from her garland picks the weed.
Thus hopes of ev'ry sort, whatever sect
Esteem them, sow them, rear them, and protect,
If wild in Nature, and not duly found,
Gethsemane! in thy dear hallow'd ground,
That cannot bear the blaze of Scripture light,
Nor cheer the spirit, nor refresh the sight,
Nor animate the soul to Christian deeds—
Oh, cast them from thee!—are weeds, arrant weeds.
Ethelred's house, the centre of six ways,
Diverging each from each, like equal rays,
Himself as bountiful as April rains,
Lord paramount of the surrounding plains,
Would give relief of bed and board to none
But guests that sought it in th' appointed ONE;
And they might enter at his open door,
E'en till his spacious halls would hold no more.
He sent a servant forth by ev'ry road,
To sound his horn, and publish it abroad,

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That all might mark—knight, menial, high and low,—
An ord'nance it concern'd them much to know.
If, after all, some headstrong hardy lout
Would disobey, though sure to be shut out,
Could he with reason murmur at his case,
Himself sole author of his own disgrace?
No! the decree was just and without flaw;
And he that made, had right to make, the law;
His sov'reign power and pleasure unrestrain'd,
The wrong was his who wrongfully complain'd.
  Yet half mankind maintain a churlish strife
With Him, the Donor of eternal life,
Because the deed, by which His love confirms
The largess He bestows, prescribes the terms.
Compliance with His will your lot ensures,
Accept it only, and the boon is yours;
And sure it is as kind to smile and give,
As with a frown to say,—Do this and live.
Love is not pedlar's trump'ry, bought and sold,
He *will* give freely, or He *will* withhold;
His soul abhors a mercenary thought,
And him as deeply who abhors it not;
He stipulates, indeed, but merely this,
That man will freely take an unbought bliss,
Will trust Him for a faithful gen'rous part,
Nor set a price upon a willing heart.
Of all the ways that seem to promise fair
To place you where His saints His presence share,
This only can; for this plain cause, express'd
In terms as plain, Himself has shut the rest.
But oh, the strife, the bick'ring, and debate,
The tidings of unpurchased heaven create!
The flirted fan, the bridle, and the toss,
All speakers, yet all language at a loss.
From stucco'd walls smart arguments rebound;
And beaux, adepts in ev'ry thing profound,
Die of disdain, or whistle off the sound.
Such is the clamour of rooks, daws, and kites,
Th' explosion of the levell'd tube excites,
Where mould'ring abbey-walls o'erhang the glade,
And oaks coeval spread a mournful shade;

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The screaming nations, hov'ring in mid air,
Loudly resent the stranger's freedom there,
And seem to warn him never to repeat
His bold intrusion on their dark retreat.
  Adieu! Vinosa cries, ere yet he sips
The purple bumper trembling at his lips,
Adieu to all morality! if grace
Make works a vain ingredient in the case.
The Christian hope is—Waiter, draw the cork—
If I mistake not—Blockhead! with a fork!—
Without good works, whatever some may boast,
Mere folly and delusion—Sir, your toast.—
My firm persuasion is, at least sometimes,
That Heaven will weigh man's virtues and his crimes
With nice attention, in a righteous scale,
And save or damn as these or those prevail.
I plant my foot upon this ground of trust,
And silence ev'ry fear with—God is just.
But if perchance on some dull drizzling day
A thought intrude, that says, or seems to say,
If thus th' important cause is to be tried,
Suppose the beam should dip on the wrong side;
I soon recover from these needless frights,
And, God is merciful, sets all to rights.
Thus, between justice, as my prime support,
And mercy, fled to as the last resort,
I glide and stêal along with heaven in view,
And—Pardon me, the bottle stands with you.
  I never will believe, the Col'nel cries,
The sanguinary schemes that some devise,
Who make the good Creator on their plan
A being of less equity than man.
If appetite, or what divines call lust,
Which men comply with, e'en because they must,
Be punish'd with perdition, who is pure?
Then theirs, no doubt, as well as mine, is sure.
If sentence of eternal pain belong
To ev'ry sudden slip and transient wrong,
Then Heaven enjoins the fallible and frail
A hopeless task, and damns them if they fail.

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My creed (whatever some creed makers mean
By Athanasian nonsense, or Nicene,)
My creed is, he is safe that does his best,
And death 's a doom sufficient for the rest.
  Right, says an ensign; and, for aught I see,
Your faith and mine substantially agree;
The best of ev'ry man's performance here
Is to discharge the duties of his sphere.
A lawyer's dealings should be just and fair —
Honesty shines with great advantage there.
Fasting and prayer sit well upon a priest —
A decent caution and reserve at least.
A soldier's best is courage in the field,
With nothing here that wants to be conceal'd:
Manly deportment, gallant, easy, gay;
A hand as lib'ral as the light of day.
The soldier thus endow'd, who never shrinks,
Nor closets up his thought, whate'er he thinks,
Who scorns to do an injury by stealth,
Must go to heaven—and I must drink his health.
Sir Smug, he cries, (for lowest at the board,
Just made fifth chaplain of his patron lord,
His shoulders witnessing, by many a shrug,
How much his feelings suffer'd, sat Sir Smug,)
Your office is to winnow false from true;
Come, prophet, drink, and tell us what think you?
  Sighing and smiling as he takes his glass,
Which they that woo preferment rarely pass,
Fallible man, the church-bred youth replies,
Is still found fallible, however wise;
And diff'ring judgments serve but to declare,
That truth lies somewhere, if we knew but where.
Of all it ever was my lot to read,
Of critics now alive, or long since dead,
The book of all the world that charm'd me most
Was — well-a-day! the titlepage was lost;
The writer well remarks, a heart that knows
To take with gratitude what Heaven bestows,
With prudence always ready at our call
To guide our use of it, is all in all.

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Doubtless it is—To which, of my own store,
I superadd a few essentials more;
But these, excuse the liberty I take,
I wave just now, for conversation's sake.—
Spoke like an oracle! they all exclaim,
And add Right Rev'rend to Smug's honour'd name.
  And yet our lot is given us in a land
Where busy arts are never at a stand;
Where science points her telescopic eye,
Familiar with the wonders of the sky;
Where bold inquiry, diving out of sight,
Brings many a precious pearl of truth to light;
Where nought eludes the persevering quest
That fashion, taste, or luxury, suggest.
  But, above all, in her own light array'd,
See mercy's grand apocalypse display'd!
The sacred book no longer suffers wrong,
Bound in the fetters of an unknown tongue;
But speaks with plainness art could never mend,
What simplest minds can soonest comprehend.
God gives the word—the preachers throng around,
Live from his lips, and spread the glorious sound:
That sound bespeaks Salvation on her way,
The trumpet of a life-restoring day;
'Tis heard where England's eastern glory shines,
And in the gulfs of her Cornubian mines.*
And still it spreads. See Germany send forth
Her sons † to pour it on the farthest north;
Fired with a zeal peculiar, *they* defy
The rage and rigour of a polar sky,
And plant successfully sweet Sharon's rose
On icy plains, and in eternal snows.
  O blest within th' enclosure of your rocks,
Nor herds have ye to boast, nor bleating flocks;
No fertilizing streams your fields divide,
That shew reversed the villas on their side;
No groves have ye; no cheerful sound of bird,
Or voice of turtle, in your land is heard;

* "Eastern glory," London. "Cornubia," ancient name of Cornwall.
† The Moravian Missionaries in Greenland. *Vide* Krantz.—Author's note.

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Nor grateful eglantine regales the smell
Of those that walk at evening where ye dwell:
But Winter, arm'd with terrors here unknown,
Sits absolute on his unshaken throne;
Piles up his stores amidst the frozen waste,
And bids the mountains he has built stand fast;
Beckons the legions of his storms away
From happier scenes, to make your land a prey;
Proclaims the soil a conquest he has won,
And scorns to share it with the distant sun.
Yet truth is yours, remote, unenvied isle![1]
And peace, the genuine offspring of her smile;
The pride of letter'd ignorance, that binds
In chains of error our accomplish'd minds,
That decks, with all the splendour of the true,
A false religion, is unknown to you.
Nature, indeed, vouchsafes for our delight
The sweet vicissitudes of day and night;
Soft airs and genial moisture feed and cheer
Field, fruit, and flower, and every creature here;
But brighter beams than his who fires the skies,
Have risen at length on your admiring eyes,
That shoot into your darkest caves the day,
From which our nicer optics turn away.
  Here see th' encouragement grace gives to vice,
The dire effect of mercy without price!
What were they? What some fools are made by art,
They were by nature,—atheists, head and heart.
The gross idolatry blind heathens teach
Was too refined for them, beyond their reach.
Not even the glorious sun,—though men revere
The monarch most that seldom will appear,
And though his beams, that quicken where they shine,
May claim some right to be esteem'd divine,—
Not e'en the sun, desirable as rare,
Could bend one knee, engage one vot'ry there;
They were, what base credulity believes
True Christians are, dissemblers, drunkards, thieves.
The full-gorged savage, at his nauseous feast
Spent half the darkness, and snored out the rest;

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Was one whom Justice, on an equal plan,
Denouncing death upon the sins of man,
Might almost have indulged with an escape,
Chargeable only with a human shape.
What are they now?—Morality may spare
Her grave concern, her kind suspicions there;
The wretch, who once sang wildly, danced, and laugh'd,
And suck'd in dizzy madness with his draught,
Has wept a silent flood, reversed his ways,
Is sober, meek, benevolent, and prays,
Feeds sparingly, communicates his store,
Abhors the craft he boasted of before,—
And he that stole, has learn'd to steal no more.
Well spake the prophet, Let the desert sing,
Where sprang the thorn the spiry fir shall spring,
And where unsightly and rank thistles grew
Shall grow the myrtle and luxuriant yew.
Go now, and with important tone demand
On what foundation virtue is to stand,
If self-exalting claims be turn'd adrift,
And grace be grace indeed, and life a gift;
The poor reclaim'd inhabitant, his eyes
Glist'ning at once with pity and surprise,
Amazed that shadows should obscure the sight
Of one whose birth was in a land of light,
Shall answer, Hope, sweet Hope! has set me free,
And made all pleasures else mere dross to me.
These, amidst scenes as waste as if denied
The common care that waits on all beside,
Wild as if Nature there, void of all good,
Play'd only gambols in a frantic mood,
(Yet charge not heavenly skill with having plann'd
A plaything world, unworthy of his hand,)
Can see his love—though secret evil lurks
In all we touch—stamp'd plainly on his works;
Deem life a blessing with its num'rous woes,
Nor spurn away a gift a God bestows.
Hard task, indeed, o'er arctic seas to roam!
Is Hope exotic? grows it not at home?
Yes, but an object, bright as orient morn,
May press the eye too closely to be borne;

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A distant virtue we can all confess,
It hurts our pride and moves our envy less.
  Leuconomus[2] (beneath well-sounding Greek
I slur a name a poet must not speak)
Stood pilloried on infamy's high stage,
And bore the pelting scorn of half an age;
The very butt of slander, and the blot
For every dart that malice ever shot.
The man that mention'd *him* at once dismiss'd
All mercy from his lips, and sneer'd and hiss'd;
His crimes were such as Sodom never knew,
And perjury stood up to swear all true;
His aim was mischief, and his zeal pretence,
His speech rebellion against common sense;
A knave, when tried on honesty's plain rule;
And when by that of reason, a mere fool;
The world's best comfort was, his doom was pass'd;
Die when he might, he must be damn'd at last.
  Now, Truth, perform thine office,—waft aside
The curtain drawn by Prejudice and Pride,
Reveal — the man is dead — to wond'ring eyes
This more than monster, in his proper guise.
  He loved the world that hated him; the tear
That dropp'd upon his Bible was sincere;
Assail'd by scandal and the tongue of strife,
His only answer was a blameless life;
And he that forged, and he that threw the dart,
Had each a brother's interest in his heart.
Paul's love of Christ, and steadiness unbribed,
Were copied close in him, and well transcribed.
He followed Paul; his zeal a kindred flame,
His apostolic charity the same.
Like him, cross'd cheerfully tempestuous seas,
Forsaking country, kindred, friends, and ease;
Like him he labour'd, and like him, content
To bear it, suffer'd shame where'er he went.
  Blush, Calumny! and write upon his tomb,
If honest eulogy can spare thee room,
Thy deep repentance of thy thousand lies,
Which, aim'd at him, have pierced the offended skies!

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And say, Blot out my sin, confess'd, deplored,
Against thine image, in thy saint, O Lord!
No blinder bigot, I maintain it still,
Than he who must have pleasure, come what will:
He laughs, whatever weapon truth may draw,
And deems her sharp artillery mere straw.
Scripture, indeed, is plain; but God and he
On Scripture ground are sure to disagree;
Some wiser rule must teach him how to live
Than this his Maker has seen fit to give;
Supple and flexible as Indian cane,
To take the bend his appetites ordain;
Contrived to suit frail Nature's crazy case,
And reconcile his lusts with saving grace.
By this, with nice precision of design,
He draws upon life's map a zigzag line,
That shews how far 'tis safe to follow sin,
And where his danger and God's wrath begin.
By this he forms, as pleased he sports along,
His well poised estimate of right and wrong;
And finds the modish manners of the day,
Though loose, as harmless as an infant's play.
Build by whatever plan caprice decrees,
With what materials, on what ground you please,
Your hope shall stand unblamed, perhaps admired,
If not that hope the Scripture has required.
The strange conceits, vain projects, and wild dreams,
With which hypocrisy for ever teems,
(Though other follies strike the public eye,
And raise a laugh,) pass unmolested by;
But if, unblameable in word and thought,
A man arise, a man whom God has taught,
With all Elijah's dignity of tone,
And all the love of the beloved John,
To storm the citadels they build in air,
And smite th' untemper'd wall; 'tis death to spare!
To sweep away all refuges of lies,
And place, instead of quirks themselves devise,
LAMA SABACTHANI before their eyes;
To prove, that without CHRIST all gain is loss,
All hope despair, that stands not on his cross;

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Except the few his God may have impress'd,
A tenfold frenzy seizes all the rest.
Throughout mankind, the Christian kind at least,
There dwells a consciousness in ev'ry breast,
That folly ends where genuine hope begins,
And he that finds his heaven must lose his sins.
Nature opposes with her utmost force
This riving stroke, this ultimate divorce;
And, while religion seems to be her view,
Hates with a deep sincerity *the true*:
For this, of all that ever influenced man,
Since Abel worshipp'd, or the world began,
This only spares no lust, admits no plea,
But makes him, if at all, completely free;
Sounds forth the signal, as she mounts her car,
Of an eternal, universal war;
Rejects all treaty, penetrates all wiles,
Scorns with the same indiff'rence frowns and smiles;
Drives through the realms of sin, where riot reels,
And grinds his crown beneath her burning wheels!
Hence all that is in man,—pride, passion, art,
Powers of the mind and feelings of the heart,
Insensible of truth's almighty charms,
Starts at her first approach, and sounds to arms!
While bigotry, with well-dissembled fears,
His eyes shut fast, his fingers in his ears,
Mighty to parry and push by God's word,
With senseless noise, his argument the sword,
Pretends a zeal for godliness and grace,
And spits abhorrence in the Christian's face.
Parent of Hope, immortal Truth! make known
Thy deathless wreaths, and triumphs all thine own:
The silent progress of thy power is such,
Thy means so feeble, and despised so much,
That few believe the wonders thou hast wrought,
And none can teach them, but whom thou hast taught.
Oh, see me sworn to serve thee, and command
A painter's skill into a poet's hand;
That while I, trembling, trace a work divine,
Fancy may stand aloof from the design,
And light, and shade, and ev'ry stroke, be thine.

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If ever thou hast felt another's pain,
If ever when he sigh'd hast sigh'd again,
If ever on thine eyelid stood the tear
That pity had engender'd, drop one here.
This man was happy, had the world's good word,
And with it every joy it can afford;
Friendship and love seem'd tenderly at strife,
Which most should sweeten his untroubled life;
Politely learn'd, and of a gentle race,
Good breeding and good sense gave all a grace;
And, whether at the toilette of the fair
He laugh'd and trifled, made him welcome there;
Or, if in masculine debate he shared,
Ensured him mute attention and regard.
Alas, how changed! Expressive of his mind,
His eyes are sunk, arms folded, head reclined;
Those awful syllables, hell, death, and sin,
Though whisper'd, plainly tell what works within,—
That conscience there performs her proper part,
And writes a doomsday sentence on his heart;
Forsaking, and forsaken of all friends,
He now perceives where earthly pleasure ends:
Hard task! for one who lately knew no care,
And harder still as learnt beneath despair;
His hours no longer pass unmark'd away,
A dark importance saddens every day;
He hears the notice of the clock perplex'd,
And cries, Perhaps eternity strikes next!
Sweet music is no longer music here,
And laughter sounds like madness in his ear;
His grief the world of all her power disarms,
Wine has no taste, and beauty has no charms:
God's holy word, once trivial in his view,
Now by the voice of his experience true,
Seems, as it is, the fountain whence alone
Must spring that hope he pants to make his own.[3]
Now let the bright reverse be known abroad;
Say man's a worm, and power belongs to God.
As when a felon, whom his country's laws
Have justly doom'd for some atrocious cause,

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Expects, in darkness and heart-chilling fears,
The shameful close of all his mispent years;
If chance, on heavy pinions slowly borne,
A tempest usher in the dreaded morn,
Upon his dungeon walls the lightning play,
The thunder seems to summon him away,
The warder at the door his key applies,
Shoots back the bolt, and all his courage dies,—
If then, just then, all thoughts of mercy lost,
When Hope, long ling'ring, at last yields the ghost,
The sound of pardon pierce his startled ear,
He drops at once his fetters and his fear;
A transport glows in all he looks and speaks,
And the first thankful tears bedew his cheeks.
Joy, far superior joy, that much outweighs
The comfort of a few poor added days,
Invades, possesses, and o'erwhelms the soul
Of him, whom Hope has with a touch made whole.
'Tis heaven, all heaven, descending on the wings
Of the glad legions of the King of kings;
'Tis more—'tis God diffused through every part,
'Tis God himself triumphant in his heart.
Oh, welcome now the sun's once hated light,
His noonday beams were never half so bright.
Not kindred minds alone are call'd t' employ
Their hours, their days, in list'ning to his joy;
Unconscious Nature, all that he surveys,
Rocks, groves, and streams, must join him in his praise.*

These are thy glorious works, eternal Truth!
The scoff of wither'd age and beardless youth;
These move the censure and illib'ral grin
Of fools that hate thee and delight in sin:
But these shall last when night has quench'd the pole,
And heaven is all departed as a scroll;
And when, as justice has long since decreed,
This earth shall blaze, and a new world succeed,—

* See Life for a description of that joy which Cowper felt within his own breast upon a change "from death to life," such as he here describes.

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Then these thy glorious works, and they who share
That Hope which can alone exclude despair,
Shall live exempt from weakness and decay,
The brightest wonders of an endless day.
  Happy the bard, (if that fair name belong
To him that blends no fable with his song)
Whose lines, uniting by an honest art
The faithful monitor's and poet's part,
Seek to delight, that they may mend mankind,
And, while they captivate, inform the mind;
Still happier, if he till a thankful soil,
And fruit reward his honourable toil:
But happier far, who comfort those that wait
To hear plain truth at Judah's hallow'd gate;
Their language simple, as their manners meek,
No shining ornaments have they to seek;
Nor labour they, nor time nor talents waste,
In sorting flowers to suit a fickle taste;
But while they speak the wisdom of the skies,
Which art can only darken and disguise,
Th' abundant harvest, recompense divine,
Repays their work—the gleaning only mine.

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CHARITY.

"And now abideth Faith, Hope, and Charity, these three; but the greatest of these is Charity." Such appears to have been the general truth which the poet proposed to illustrate. When his four admonitory poems are compared together, they display a beautiful system of Christian precept and morality, which critics seem to have overlooked; and hence the complaint, that Cowper wants design,—that he has constructed no regular or magnificent assemblage of accessories subservient to some great purpose, however perfect may be the details apart. We may hereafter consider this objection in reference to the Task; meanwhile it is unfounded when applied to the Christian poems, as they may be justly termed. These, while individually founded upon particular doctrines, form together a general exhortation to the practice of piety. Not only this, but we find the systematic arrangement well sustained on the whole, though it may seem loose in some instances, when the poems are separately considered. The efficacy of faith is laid down as an essential preliminary in a Christian life; hence the sanctification of works, and Charity, the practical evidence of that faith, through which her labours of love are accepted. From the cause the poet thus proceeds to the effect; never separating, as the Christians whom he represents have thoughtlessly been accused of doing, the

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principle of inward conviction from the rule of outward conduct.

With Charity, which thus places the cornice on the Christian edifice, Cowper properly closes the series of his evangelical poems. It was composed in little more than a fortnight, and finished on the 12th of July, 1781. He has conceived a most noble idea of his subject.

> The soul thus kindled from above
> Spreads wide her arms of universal love;
> And still enlarged as she receives the grace,
> Includes creation in her close embrace!

The theme thus entertained, the poet has treated with corresponding grandeur. Man's most extended relations with his fellow, — navigation, commerce, science, art, — are rendered the instruments of Christian charity, — the bands,

> To associate all the branches of mankind.

In like manner, all the associations of the social compact are shewn to draw their real strength, or softening influence, from the same purified fountain of universal love. What more admirable in design than this, when speaking of a grace which more than any other has extended the catalogue of human virtues; which gave to the human understanding an idea for which uninspired language had no sign; and to the human heart a feeling which, awakening in the inmost circle of its sweetest and holiest ties, breathes abroad its aspirations over the whole family of mankind!

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CHARITY.

> Qua nihil majus meliusve terris
> Fata donavere, bonique divi;
> Nec dabunt, quamvis redeant in aurum
> Tempora priscum.
>
> Hor. Lib. iv. Od. 2.

Fairest and foremost of the train that wait
On man's most dignified and happiest state,
Whether we name thee Charity or Love,
Chief grace below, and all in all above,
Prosper (I press thee with a powerful plea)
A task I venture on, impell'd by thee:
O never seen but in thy blest effects,
Or felt but in the soul that Heaven selects;
Who seeks to praise thee, and to make thee known
To other hearts, must have thee in his own.
Come, prompt me with benevolent desires,
Teach me to kindle at thy gentle fires,
And, though disgraced and slighted, to redeem
A poet's name, by making thee the theme,
God, working ever on a social plan,
By various ties attaches man to man:
He made at first, though free and unconfined,
One man the common father of the kind,
That every tribe, though placed as he sees best,
Where seas or deserts part them from the rest,
Differing in language, manners, or in face,
Might feel themselves allied to all the race.
When Cook[1]—lamented, and with tears as just
As ever mingled with heroic dust—
Steer'd Britain's oak into a world unknown,
And in his country's glory sought his own,
Wherever he found man, to nature true,
The rights of man were sacred in his view;
He soothed with gifts and greeted with a smile
The simple native of the new-found isle;

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He spurn'd the wretch that slighted or withstood
The tender argument of kindred blood,
Nor would endure that any should control
His free born brethren of the southern pole.
  But though some nobler minds a law respect,
That none shall with impunity neglect,
In baser souls unnumber'd evils meet
To thwart its influence and its end defeat.
While Cook is loved for savage lives he saved,
See Cortes[2] odious for a world enslaved!
Where wast thou then, sweet Charity? where then,
Thou tutelary friend of helpless men?
Wast thou in monkish cells and nunn'ries found,
Or building hospitals on English ground?
No. Mammon makes the world his legatee
Through fear, not love; and Heaven abhors the fee.
Wherever found, (and all men need thy care,)
Nor age nor infancy could find thee there.
The hand that slew till it could slay no more,
Was glued to the sword-hilt with Indian gore.
Their prince, as justly seated on his throne
As vain imperial Philip on his own,
Trick'd out of all his royalty by art,
That stripp'd him bare, and broke his honest heart,
Died by the sentence of a shaven priest,
For scorning what they taught him to detest.
How dark the veil that intercepts the blaze
Of Heaven's mysterious purposes and ways;
God stood not, though he seem'd to stand, aloof;
And at this hour the conqu'ror feels the proof:
The wreath he won drew down an instant curse,
The fretting plague is in the public purse,
The canker'd spoil corrodes the pining state,
Starved by that indolence their mines create.
  Oh, could their ancient Incas* rise again,
How would they take up Israel's taunting strain!
Art thou too fall'n, Iberia? Do we see
The robber and the murd'rer weak as we?

* Incas, "sons of the sun," the native princes of Peru; Iberia, the ancient name of Spain.

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Thou, that hast wasted earth, and dared despise
Alike the wrath and mercy of the skies,
Thy pomp is in the grave, thy glory laid
Low in the pits thine avarice has made.
We come with joy from our eternal rest,
To see th' oppressor in his turn oppress'd.
Art thou the god, the thunder of whose hand
Roll'd over all our desolated land,
Shook principalities and kingdoms down,
And made the mountains tremble at his frown?
The sword shall light upon thy boasted powers,
And waste them, as thy sword has wasted ours.
'Tis thus Omnipotence his law fulfills,
And vengeance executes what justice wills.

Again: The band of commerce was design'd
T' associate all the branches of mankind;
And if a boundless plenty be the robe,
Trade is the golden girdle, of the globe.
Wise to promote whatever end He means,
God opens fruitful Nature's various scenes;
Each climate needs what other climes produce,
And offers something to the general use;
No land but listens to the common call,
And in return receives supply from all,
This genial intercourse, and mutual aid,
Cheers what were else an universal shade,
Calls Nature from her ivy-mantled den,
And softens human rock-work into men.
Ingenious Art, with her expressive face,
Steps forth to fashion and refine the race;
Not only fills Necessity's demand,
But overcharges her capacious hand:
Capricious Taste itself can crave no more
Than she supplies from her abounding store;
She strikes out all that Luxury can ask,
And gains new vigour at her endless task.
Hers is the spacious arch, the shapely spire,
The painter's pencil, and the poet's lyre;
From her the canvass borrows light and shade,
And verse, more lasting, hues that never fade.

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She guides the finger o'er the dancing keys,
Gives difficulty all the grace of ease,
And pours a torrent of sweet notes around,
Fast as the thirsting ear can drink the sound.
  These are the gifts of Art; and Art thrives most
Where Commerce has enrich'd the busy coast;
He catches all improvements in his flight,
Spreads foreign wonders in his country's sight,
Imports what others have invented well,
And stirs his own to match them, or excel.
'Tis thus, reciprocating each with each,
Alternately the nations learn and teach;
While Providence enjoins to every soul
A union with the vast terraqueous whole.
  Heaven speed the canvass, gallantly unfurl'd
To furnish and accommodate a world,
To give the pole the produce of the sun,
And knit th' unsocial climates into one.
Soft airs and gentle heavings of the wave
Impel the fleet whose errand is to save,
To succour wasted regions, and replace
The smile of Opulence in Sorrow's face.
Let nothing adverse, nothing unforeseen,
Impede the bark, that ploughs the deep serene,
Charged with a freight transcending in its worth
The gems of India, Nature's rarest birth,
That flies, like Gabriel, on his Lord's commands,
A herald of God's love to pagan lands.
But, ah! what wish can prosper, or what prayer,
For merchants rich in cargoes of despair,
Who drive a loathsome traffic — gauge, and span,
And buy the muscles and the bones of man!
The tender ties of father, husband, friend,
All bonds of nature in that moment end;
And each endures, while yet he draws his breath,
A stroke as fatal as the scythe of death.
The sable warrior, frantic with regret
Of her he loves, and never can forget,
Loses in tears the far receding shore,
But not the thought that they must meet no more;

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Deprived of her and freedom at a blow,
What has he left that he can yet forego?
Yes, to deep sadness sullenly resign'd,
He feels his body's bondage in his mind;
Puts off his generous nature; and, to suit
His manners with his fate, puts on the brute.
  Oh, most degrading of all ills that wait
On many a mourner in his best estate!
All other sorrows virtue may endure,
And find submission more than half a cure;
Grief is itself a medicine, and bestow'd
T' improve the fortitude that bears the load,
To teach the wanderer, as his woes increase,
The path of wisdom, all whose paths are peace;
But slavery—virtue dreads it as her grave:
Patience itself is meanness in a slave;
Or if the will and sovereignty of God
Bid suffer it a while, and kiss the rod,
Wait for the dawning of a brighter day,
And snap the chain the moment when you may.
Nature imprints upon whate'er we see,
That has a heart and life in it, Be free!
The beasts are charter'd — neither age nor force
Can quell the love of freedom in a horse:
He breaks the cord that held him at the rack,
And, conscious of an unencumber'd back,
Snuffs up the morning air, forgets the rein,
Loose fly his forelock and his ample mane:
Responsive to the distant neigh he neighs;
Nor stops till, overleaping all delays,
He finds the pasture where his fellows graze.
  Canst thou, and honour'd with a Christian name,
Buy what is woman-born, and feel no shame?
Trade in the blood of innocence, and plead
Expedience as a warrant for the deed?
So may the wolf, whom famine has made bold
To quit the forest and invade the fold;
So may the ruffian, who, with ghostly glide,
Dagger in hand, steals close to your bed side
Not he, but his emergence, forced the door,
He found it inconvenient to be poor.

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Has God then given its sweetness to the cane,
Unless his laws be trampled on, in vain?
Built a brave world, which cannot yet subsist,
Unless his right to rule it be dismiss'd?
Impudent blasphemy! So folly pleads,
And, avarice being judge, with ease succeeds.
  But grant the plea, and let it stand for just,
That man make man his prey, because he *must*;
Still there is room for pity to abate,
And soothe the sorrows of so sad a state.
A Briton knows, or if he knows it not,
The Scripture placed within his reach, he ought,
That souls have no discriminating hue,
Alike important in their Maker's view;
That none are free from blemish since the Fall,
And Love divine has paid one price for all.
The wretch, that works and weeps without relief,
Has one that notices his silent grief.
He, from whose hands alone all power proceeds,
Ranks its abuse among the foulest deeds,
Considers *all* injustice with a frown;
But *marks* the man that treads his fellow down.
Begone!—the whip and bell in that hard hand
Are hateful ensigns of usurp'd command.
Not Mexico could purchase kings a claim
To scourge him, weariness his only blame.
Remember Heaven has an avenging rod:
To smite the poor is treason against God.
  Trouble is grudgingly and hardly brook'd,
While life's sublimest joys are overlook'd:
We wander o'er a sunburnt thirsty soil,
Murm'ring and weary of our daily toil,
Forget t' enjoy the palm tree's offer'd shade,
Or taste the fountain in the neighb'ring glade:
Else who would lose, that had the power t' improve,
Th' occasion of transmuting fear to love?
Oh, 'tis a godlike privilege to save!
And he that scorns it is himself a slave.
Inform his mind; one flash of heavenly day
Would heal his heart, and melt his chains away.

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"Beauty for ashes" is a gift indeed!
And slaves, by truth enlarged, are doubly freed.
Then would he say, submissive at thy feet,
While gratitude and love made service sweet,
My dear deliv'rer out of hopeless night,
Whose bounty bought me but to give me light,
I was a bondman on my native plain,
Sin forged, and ignorance made fast, the chain;
Thy lips have shed instruction as the dew,
Taught me what path to shun, and what pursue;
Farewell my former joys! I sigh no more
For Africa's once loved, benighted shore;[3]
Serving a benefactor, I am free;
At my best home, if not exiled from thee.

Some men make gain a fountain, whence proceeds
A stream of lib'ral and heroic deeds.
The swell of pity, not to be confined
Within the scanty limits of the mind,
Disdains the bank, and throws the golden sands,
A rich deposit, on the bordering lands;
These have an ear for His paternal call,
Who makes some rich for the supply of all;
God's gift with pleasure in his praise employ,
And THORNTON[4] is familiar with the joy.

O could I worship aught beneath the skies,
That earth has seen, or fancy can devise,
Thine altar, sacred Liberty,[5] should stand,
Built by no mercenary vulgar hand,
With fragrant turf, and flowers as wild and fair
As ever dress'd a bank, or scented summer air.
Duly, as ever on the mountain's height
The peep of morning shed a dawning light;
Again, when ev'ning in her sober vest,
Drew the gray curtain of the fading west,
My soul should yield thee willing thanks and praise,
For the chief blessings of my fairest days:
But that were sacrilege—praise is not thine,
But His who gave thee, and preserves thee mine:
Else I would say, and as I spake bid fly
A captive bird into the boundless sky,

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This triple realm adores thee—thou art come
From Sparta hither, and art here at home.
We feel thy force still active, at this hour
Enjoy immunity from priestly power,
While conscience, happier than in ancient years,
Owns no superior but the God she fears.
Propitious spirit! yet expunge a wrong
Thy rights have suffer'd, and our land, too long.
Teach mercy to ten thousand hearts, that share
The fears and hopes of a commercial care.
Prisons expect the wicked, and were built
To bind the lawless and to punish guilt;
But shipwreck, earthquake, battle, fire, and flood,
Are mighty mischiefs not to be withstood;
And honest merit stands on slippery ground,
Where covert guile and artifice abound.
Let just restraint, for public peace design'd,
Chain up the wolves and tigers of mankind;
The foe of virtue has no claim to thee,
But let insolvent innocence go free.

Patron of else the most despised of men,
Accept the tribute of a stranger's pen;
Verse, like the laurel, its immortal meed,
Should be the guerdon of a noble deed;
I may alarm thee, but I fear the shame
(Charity chosen as my theme and aim)
I must incur, forgetting HOWARD'S name.
Blest with all wealth can give thee, to resign
Joys doubly sweet to feelings quick as thine,
To quit the bliss thy rural scenes bestow,
To seek a nobler amidst scenes of woe,
To traverse seas, range kingdoms, and bring home,
Not the proud monuments of Greece or Rome,
But knowledge such as only dungeons teach,
And only sympathy like thine could reach,
That grief, sequester'd from the public stage,
Might smooth her feathers, and enjoy her cage,
Speaks a divine ambition, and a zeal
The boldest patriot might be proud to feel.
Oh, that the voice of clamour and debate,
That pleads for peace till it disturbs the state,

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Were hush'd in favour of thy gen'rous plea,
The poor thy clients, and Heaven's smile thy fee!
  Philosophy, that does not dream or stray,
Walks arm in arm with Nature all his way;
Compasses earth, dives into it, ascends
Whatever steep inquiry recommends;
Sees planetary wonders smoothly roll
Round other systems under her control;
Drinks wisdom at the milky stream of light,
That cheers the silent journey of the night,
And brings, at his return, a bosom charged
With rich instruction, and a soul enlarged.
The treasured sweets of the capacious plain,
That heaven spreads wide before the view of man,
All prompt his pleased pursuit, and to pursue
Still prompt him with a pleasure always new:
He too has a connecting power, and draws
Man to the centre of the common cause,
Aiding a dubious and deficient sight
With a new medium and a purer light.
All truth is precious, if not all divine,
And what dilates the powers must needs refine.
He reads the skies, and, watching every change,
Provides the faculties an ampler range;
And wins mankind, as his attempts prevail,
A prouder station on the gen'ral scale.
But reason still, unless divinely taught,
Whate'er she learns, learns nothing as she ought;
The lamp of revelation only shows,
What human wisdom cannot but oppose,
That man, in Nature's richest mantle clad,
And graced with all philosophy can add,
Though fair without and luminous within,
Is still the progeny and heir of sin.
Thus taught, down falls the plumage of his pride;
He feels his need of an unerring guide,
And knows that, falling, he shall rise no more,
Unless the power that bade him stand restore.
This is indeed philosophy; this known
Makes wisdom, worthy of the name, his own;

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And, without this, whatever he discuss;
Whether the space between the stars and us;
Whether he measure earth, compute the sea,
Weigh sunbeams, carve a fly, or spit a flea;
The solemn trifler, with his boasted skill,
Toils much, and is a solemn trifler still:
Blind was he born, and, his misguided eyes
Grown dim in trifling studies, blind he dies.
Self-knowledge truly learn'd, of course implies
The rich possession of a nobler prize;
For self to self, and God to man, reveal'd,
(Two themes to Nature's eye for ever seal'd,
Are taught by rays, that fly with equal pace
From the same centre of enlight'ning grace.
Here stay thy foot; how copious and how clear
Th' o'erflowing well of Charity springs here!
Hark! 'tis the music of a thousand rills,
Some through the groves, some down the sloping hills,
Winding a secret or an open course,
And all supplied from an eternal source.
The ties of nature do but feebly bind,
And commerce partially reclaims mankind;
Philosophy, without his heavenly guide,
May blow up self-conceit, and nourish pride;
But, while his province is the reas'ning part,
Has still a veil of midnight on his heart:
'Tis truth divine, exhibited on earth,
Gives Charity her being and her birth.[7]
  Suppose (when thought is warm, and fancy flows,
What will not argument sometimes suppose?)
An isle possess'd by creatures of our kind,
Endued with reason, yet by nature blind.
Let supposition lend her aid once more,
And land some grave optician on the shore;
He claps his lens, if haply they may see,
Close to the part where vision ought to be;
But finds, that, though his tubes assist the sight,
They cannot give it, or make darkness light.
He reads wise lectures, and describes aloud
A sense they know not, to the wond'ring crowd;

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He talks of light and the prismatic hues,
As men of depth in erudition use;
But all he gains for his harangue is, "Well,
What monstrous lies some travellers will tell!"
The soul, whose sight all quick'ning grace renews,
Takes the resemblance of the good she views,
As diamonds, stripp'd of their opaque disguise,
Reflect the noonday glory of the skies.
She speaks of Him, her author, guardian, friend,
Whose love knew no beginning, knows no end,
In language warm as all that love inspires,
And in the glow of her intense desires,
Pants to communicate her noble fires.
She sees a world stark blind to what employs
Her eager thought, and feeds her flowing joys;
Though wisdom hail them, heedless of her call,
Flies to save some, and feels a pang for all:
Herself as weak as her support is strong,
She feels that frailty she denied so long;
And, from a knowledge of her own disease,
Learns to compassionate the sick she sees.
Here see, acquitted of all vain pretence,
The reign of genuine charity commence.
Though scorn repay her sympathetic tears,
She still is kind, and still she perseveres;
The truth she loves a sightless world blaspheme—
'Tis childish dotage, a delirious dream:
The danger they discern not, they deny,
Laugh at their only remedy, and die.
But still a soul thus touch'd can never cease,
Whoever threatens war, to speak of peace;
Pure in her aim, and in her temper mild,
Her wisdom seems the weakness of a child;
She makes excuses where she might condemn,
Reviled by those that hate her, prays for them;
Suspicion lurks not in her artless breast,
The worst suggested, she believes the best;
Not soon provoked, however stung and teased,
And, if perhaps made angry, soon appeased;
She rather waves than will dispute her right,
And, injured, makes forgiveness her delight.

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Such was the portrait an apostle drew,
The bright original was one he knew;
Heaven held his hand, the likeness must be true.
When one, that holds communion with the skies,
Has fill'd his urn where these pure waters rise,
And once more mingles with us meaner things,
'Tis e'en as if an angel shook his wings;
Immortal fragrance fills the circuit wide,
That tells us whence his treasures are supplied.
So when a ship, well freighted with the stores
The sun matures on India's spicy shores
Has dropt her anchor, and her canvass furl'd,
In some safe haven of our western world,
'Twere vain inquiry to what port she went,
The gale informs us, laden with the scent.
Some seek, when queasy conscience has its qualms,
To lull the painful malady with alms;
But Charity not feign'd intends alone
Another's good—their's centres in their own;
And, too short lived to reach the realms of peace,
Must cease for ever when the poor shall cease.
Flavia, most tender of her own good name,
Is rather careless of a sister's fame;
Her superfluity the poor supplies,
But, if she touch a character, it dies.
The seeming virtue weigh'd against the vice,
She deems all safe, for she has paid the price:
No charity but alms aught values she,
Except in porcelain on her mantel tree.
How many deeds, with which the world has rung,
From pride, in league with ignorance, have sprung!
But God o'errules all human follies still,
And bends the tough materials to His will.
A conflagration, or a wintry flood,
Has left some hundreds without home or food;
Extravagance and av'rice shall subscribe,
While fame and self-complacence are the bribe.
The brief proclaim'd, it visits every pew,
But first the squire's, a compliment but due;
With slow deliberation he unties
His glitt'ring purse, that envy of all eyes,

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And, while the clerk just puzzles out the psalm,
Slides guinea behind guinea in his palm:
Till finding, what he might have found before,
A smaller piece amidst the precious store,
Pinch'd close between his finger and his thumb,
He half exhibits, and then drops the sum.
Gold, to be sure!—Throughout the town 'tis told,
How the good squire gives never less than gold.
From motives such as his, though not the best,
Springs in due time supply for the distress'd;
Not less effectual than what love bestows—
Except that office clips it as it goes.
But, lest I seem to sin against a friend,
And wound the grace I mean to recommend,
(Though vice derided with a just design
Implies no trespass against love divine,)
Once more I would adopt the graver style,
A teacher should be sparing of his smile.
Unless a love of virtue light the flame,
Satire is, more than those he brands, to blame;
He hides behind a magisterial air
His own offences, and strips others bare;
Affects indeed a most humane concern,
That men, if gently tutor'd, will not learn,
That mulish folly, not to be reclaim'd
By softer methods, must be made ashamed;
But (I might instance in St Patrick's dean)
Too often rails to gratify his spleen.
Most satirists are indeed a public scourge;
Their mildest physic is a farrier's purge,
Their acrid temper turns, as soon as stirr'd,
The milk of their good purpose all to curd.
Their zeal begotten, as their works rehearse,
By lean despair upon an empty purse,
The wild assassins start into the street,
Prepared to poniard whomsoe'er they meet.
No skill in swordmanship, however just,
Can be secure against a madman's thrust;
And even virtue, so unfairly match'd,
Although immortal, may be prick'd or scratch'd
When scandal has new minted an old lie,
Or tax'd invention for a fresh supply,

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'Tis call'd a satire, and the world appears
Gath'ring around it with erected ears:
A thousand names are toss'd into the crowd;
Some whisper'd softly, and some twang'd aloud;
Just as the sapience of an author's brain
Suggests it safe or dangerous to be plain.
Strange! how the frequent interjected dash
Quickens a market, and helps off the trash;
Th' important letters, that include the rest,
Serve as a key to those that are suppress'd;
Conjecture gripes the victims in his paw,
The world is charm'd, and Scrib. escapes the law.
So, when the cold damp shades of night prevail,
Worms may be caught by either head or tail;
Forcibly drawn from many a close recess,
They meet with little pity, no redress;
Plunged in the stream, they lodge upon the mud,
Food for the famish'd rovers of the flood.

All zeal for a reform, that gives offence
To peace and charity, is mere pretence,—
A bold remark, but which, if well applied,
Would humble many a towering poet's pride:
Perhaps the man was in a sportive fit,
And had no other play-place for his wit;
Perhaps enchanted with the love of fame,
He sought the jewel in his neighbour's shame;
Perhaps — whatever end he might pursue,
The cause of virtue could not be his view.
At every stroke wit flashes in our eyes;
The turns are quick, the polish'd points surprise,
But shine with cruel and tremendous charms,
That, while they please, possess us with alarms;
So have I seen, and hasten'd to the sight
On all the wings of holiday delight,
Where stands that monument of ancient power,
Named, with emphatic dignity, the Tower,
Guns, halberts, swords, and pistols, great and small,
In starry forms disposed upon the wall;
We wonder, as we gazing stand below,
That brass and steel should make so fine a show:
But though we praise th' exact designer's skill,
Account them implements of mischief still.

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No works shall find acceptance in that day,
When all disguises shall be rent away,
That square not truly with the Scripture plan,
Nor spring from love to God, or love to man.
As He ordains things sordid in their birth
To be resolved into their parent earth;
And though the soul shall seek superior orbs,
Whate'er this world produces, it absorbs;
So self starts nothing, but what tends apace
Home to the goal where it began the race.
Such as our motive is, our aim must be;
If this be servile, that can ne'er be free:
If self employ us, whatsoe'er is wrought,
We glorify that self, not him we ought;
Such virtues had need prove their own reward,
The Judge of all men owes them no regard.
True Charity, a plant divinely nursed,
Fed by the love from which it rose at first,
Thrives against hope, and, in the rudest scene,
Storms but enliven its unfading green;
Exuberant is the shadow it supplies,
Its fruit on earth, its growth above the skies.
To look at Him, who form'd us and redeem'd,
So glorious now, though once so disesteem'd,
To see a God stretch forth his human hand,
T' uphold the boundless scenes of his command;
To recollect, that, in a form like ours,
He bruised beneath his feet th' infernal powers,
Captivity led captive, rose to claim
The wreath he won so dearly in our name;
That, throned above all height, he condescends
To call the few that trust in him his friends;
That in the heaven of heavens, that space he deems
Too scanty for th' exertion of his beams,
And shines, as if impatient to bestow
Life and a kingdom upon worms below:
That sight imparts a never-dying flame,
Though feeble in degree, in kind the same.
Like him the soul, thus kindled from above,
Spreads wide her arms of universal love;

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And, still enlarged as she receives the grace,
Includes creation in her close embrace.
Behold a Christian! and, without the fires
The founder of that name alone inspires,
Though all accomplishment, all knowledge meet,
To make the shining prodigy complete,
Whoever boasts that name — behold a cheat!
Were love, in these the world's last doting years,
As frequent as the want of it appears,
The churches warm'd, they would no longer hold
Such frozen figures, stiff as they are cold;
Relenting forms would lose their power, or cease;
And e'en the dipt and sprinkled live in peace;[8]
Each heart would quit its prison in the breast,
And flow in free communion with the rest.
The statesman, skill'd in projects dark and deep,
Might burn his useless Machiavel,[9] and sleep;
His budget often fill'd, yet always poor,
Might swing at ease behind his study door,
No longer prey upon our annual rents,
Or scare the nation with its big contents:
Disbanded legions freely might depart,
And slaying man would cease to be an art.
No learned disputants would take the field,
Sure not to conquer, and sure not to yield;
Both sides deceived, if rightly understood,
Pelting each other for the public good.
Did Charity prevail, the press would prove
A vehicle of virtue, truth, and love;
And I might spare myself the pains to show
What few can learn, and all suppose they know.
Thus have I sought to grace a serious lay
With many a wild, indeed, but flowery spray,
In hopes to gain, what else I must have lost,
Th' attention pleasure has so much engross'd.
But if, unhappily deceived, I dream,
And prove too weak for so divine a theme,
Let Charity forgive me a mistake,
That zeal, not vanity, has chanced to make,
And spare the poet for his subject's sake.

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CONVERSATION.

The title of this piece, which was composed in July, 1781, might seem to imply similarity to Table Talk. The reader, however, will remark, that they are altogether distinct in their objects, the latter being in fact a conversation, while the present poem teaches the art of conversing. From a hint in one of his letters, the poet appears to have intended to commence a second volume of poetry with this piece; but afterwards, as it would seem, abandoned the idea of publishing two small volumes instead of one of more respectable size. None of Cowper's efforts shew greater versatility than Conversation. It abounds in admirable description and well-drawn character; it is one of the smoothest in versification, and most sprightly in manner of all his earlier efforts, qualities which rendered this poem a favourite from the beginning. The poet assumes here a new office—a master of manners as well as a teacher of piety; but the great aim of his writings is never long forgotten. We sit down to be delighted, and are so; but at the same time are surprised into wisdom, and rise from the perusal of this his lightest essay both wiser and better. The solemn tenderness of the scene atEmmaus; the description of a Christian's conversation; the picture of fanaticism; the cheerful influence of religion upon the temper and conduct, are equal in true poetry to any passages which had previously adorned English literature; and yet some of them were quoted in contemporary criticism as evidence of the "author's being a good devout gentleman without one particle of genius." We have sometimes heard the same sentiment

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expressed in our own day; and, in reply, would only ask the objector to point out an equal number of lines superior to the ten which conclude Conversation. But Cowper contended not for poetical superiority; he had in his own heart the best of consolations. "The critics cannot," says he, "deprive me of the pleasure I have in reflecting, that, so far as my leisure has been employed in writing for the public, it has been conscientiously employed, and with a view to its advantage."

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CONVERSATION.

Nam neque me tantum venientis sibilus austri,
Nec percussa juvant fluctû tam litora, nec quæ
Saxosas inter decurrunt flumina valles.

VIRG. Ecl. 5.

THOUGH Nature weigh our talents, and dispense
To every man his modicum of sense,
And Conversation in its better part
May be esteem'd a gift, and not an art,
Yet much depends, as in the tiller's toil,
On culture, and the sowing of the soil.
Words learn'd by rote a parrot may rehearse,
But talking is not always to converse;
Not more distinct from harmony divine,
The constant creaking of a country sign.
As alphabets in ivory employ,
Hour after hour, the yet unletter'd boy,
Sorting and puzzling with a deal of glee
Those seeds of science call'd his A B C;
So language in the mouths of the adult,
Witness its insignificant result,
Too often proves an implement of play,
A toy to sport with, and pass time away.
Collect at evening what the day brought forth,
Compress the sum into its solid worth,
And if it weigh th' importance of a fly,
The scales are false, or algebra a lie.
Sacred interpreter of human thought,
How few respect or use thee as they ought!
But all shall give account of every wrong,
Who dare dishonour or defile the tongue;
Who prostitute it in the cause of vice,
Or sell their glory at a market price;
Who vote for hire, or point it with lampoon,
The dear bought placeman, and the cheap buffoon.

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There is a prurience in the speech of some,
Wrath stays him, or else God would strike them dumb;
His wise forbearance has their end in view,
They fill their measure, and receive their due.
The heathen lawgivers of ancient days,
Names almost worthy of a Christian's praise,
Would drive them forth from the resort of men,
And shut up every satyr in his den.
Oh, come not ye near innocence and truth,
Ye worms that eat into the bud of youth!
Infectious as impure, your blighting power
Taints in its rudiments the promised flower;
Its odour perish'd and its charming hue,
Thenceforth 'tis hateful, for it smells of you.
Not e'en the vigorous and headlong rage
Of adolescence, or a firmer age,
Affords a plea allowable or just
For making speech the pamperer of lust;
But when the breath of age commits the fault,
'Tis nauseous as the vapour of a vault.
So wither'd stumps disgrace the sylvan scene,
No longer fruitful, and no longer green;
The sapless wood, divested of the bark,
Grows fungous, and takes fire at every spark.
Oaths terminate, as Paul observes, all strife—
Some men have surely then a peaceful life;
Whatever subject occupy discourse,
The feats of Vestris,* or the naval force,
Asseveration blust'ring in your face
Makes contradiction such a hopeless case;
In every tale they tell, or false or true,
Well known, or such as no man ever knew,
They fix attention, heedless of your pain,
With oaths like rivets forced into the brain;
And e'en when sober truth prevails throughout,
They swear it, till affirmance breeds a doubt.
A Persian, humble servant of the sun,
Who, though devout, yet bigotry had none,

* The name of a celebrated Parisian dancer. The family consisted of three generations upon the stage at once.

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Hearing a lawyer, grave in his address,
With adjurations every word impress,
Supposed the man a bishop, or, at least,
God's name so much upon his lips, a priest;
Bow'd at the close with all his graceful airs,
And begg'd an interest in his frequent prayers.
  Go, quit the rank to which ye stood preferr'd,
Henceforth associate in one common herd;
Religion, virtue, reason, common sense,
Pronounce your human form a false pretence;
A mere disguise, in which a devil lurks,
Who yet betrays his secret by his works.
  Ye powers who rule the tongue, if such there are,
And make colloquial happiness your care,
Preserve me from the thing I dread and hate —
A duel in the form of a debate.
The clash of arguments and jar of words,
Worse than the mortal brunt of rival swords,
Decide no question with their tedious length,
(For opposition gives opinion strength)
Divert the champions prodigal of breath,
And put the peaceably disposed to death.
Oh thwart me not, Sir Soph,* at every turn,
Nor carp at every flaw you may discern;
Though syllogisms hang not on my tongue,
I am not surely always in the wrong;
'Tis hard if all is false that I advance —
A fool must now and then be right by chance.
Not that all freedom of dissent I blame;
No — there I grant the privilege I claim,
A disputable point is no man's ground;
Rove where you please, 'tis common all around.
Discourse may want an animated — No,
To brush the surface, and to make it flow:
But still remember, if you mean to please,
To press your point with modesty and ease.
The mark, at which my juster aim I take,
Is contradiction for its own dear sake.

* Soph, a term in the English Universities for a student who is not a graduate.

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Set your opinion at whatever pitch,
Knots and impediments make something hitch;
Adopt his own, 'tis equally in vain,
Your thread of argument is snapp'd again;
The wrangler, rather than accord with you,
Will judge himself deceived, and prove it too.
Vociferated logic kills me quite,
A noisy man is always in the right,
I twirl my thumbs, fall back into my chair,
Fix on the wainscoat a distressful stare,
And, when I hope his blunders are all out,
Reply discreetly — To be sure — No doubt.
  Dubius is such a scrupulous good man —
Yes — you may catch him tripping, if you can.
He would not with a peremptory tone,
Assert the nose upon his face his own;
With hesitation admirably slow,
He humbly hopes — presumes — it may be so.
His evidence, if he were call'd by law
To swear to some enormity he saw,
For want of prominence and just relief,
Would hang an honest man, and save a thief.
Through constant dread of giving truth offence,
He ties up all his hearers in suspense;
Knows what he knows, as if he knew it not,
What he remembers, seems to have forgot;
His sole opinion, whatsoe'er befall,
Cent'ring at last in having none at all.
Yet, though he tease and balk your listening ear,
He makes one useful point exceeding clear:
Howe'er ingenious on his darling theme
A sceptic in philosophy may seem,
Reduced to practice, his beloved rule
Would only prove him a consummate fool;
Useless in him alike both brain and speech,
Fate having placed all truth above his reach,
His ambiguities his total sum,
He might as well be blind, and deaf, and dumb.
  Where men of judgment creep and feel their way,
The positive pronounce without dismay;

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Their want of light and intellect supplied
By sparks absurdity strikes out of pride:
Without the means of knowing right from wrong,
They always are decisive, clear, and strong;
Where others toil with philosophic force,
Their nimble nonsense takes a shorter course,
Flings at your head conviction in the lump,
And gains remote conclusions at a jump:
Their own defect, invisible to them,
Seen in another, they at once condemn,
And, though self-idolized in every case,
Hate their own likeness in a brother's face.
The cause is plain, and not to be denied,
The proud are always most provoked by pride;
Few competitions but engender spite,
And those the most where neither has a right.
The point of honour has been deem'd of use
To teach good manners, and to curb abuse;
Admit it true, the consequence is clear,
Our polish'd manners are a mask we wear,
And, at the bottom, barb'rous still and rude,
We are restrain'd, indeed, but not subdued;
The very remedy, however sure,
Springs from the mischief it intends to cure,
And savage in its principle appears,
Tried, as it should be, by the fruit it bears.
'Tis hard, indeed, if nothing will defend
Mankind from quarrels but their fatal end,
That now and then a hero must decease,
That the surviving world may live in peace.
Perhaps, at last, close scrutiny may show
The practice dastardly, and mean, and low;
That men engage in it compell'd by force,
And fear, not courage, is its proper source;
The fear of tyrant custom, and the fear
Lest fops should censure us, and fools should sneer.
At least, to trample on our Maker's laws,
And hazard life for any, or no cause,
To rush into a fix'd eternal state,
Out of the very flames of rage and hate,

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Or send another shiv'ring to the bar
With all the guilt of such unnat'ral war,
Whatever use may urge, or honour plead,
On reason's verdict is a madman's deed.
Am I to set my life upon a throw
Because a bear is rude and surly? No—
A moral, sensible, and well-bred man
Will not affront me, and no other can.
Were I empower'd to regulate the lists,
They should encounter with well-loaded fists;
A Trojan combat would be something new,
Let DARES beat ENTULLUS* black and blue;
Then each might show, to his admiring friends,
In honourable bumps his rich amends,
And carry in contusions of his skull,
A satisfactory receipt in full.
A story, in which native humour reigns,
Is often useful, always entertains;
A graver fact, inlisted on your side,
May furnish illustration, well applied;
But sedentary weavers of long tales
Give me the fidgets, and my patience fails.
'Tis the most asinine employ on earth,
To hear them tell of parentage and birth,
And echo conversations dull and dry,
Embellish'd with — *He said*, and *So said I.*
At every interview their route the same,
The repetition makes attention lame;
We bustle up with unsuccessful speed,
And in the saddest part cry — *Droll indeed!*
The path of narrative with care pursue,
Still making probability your clue,
On all the vestiges of truth attend,
And let *them* guide you to a decent end.
Of all ambitions man may entertain,
The worst that can invade a sickly brain,
Is that which angles hourly for surprise,
And baits its hook with prodigies and lies.

* Names of pugilistic combatants in Virgil.

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Credulous infancy, or age as weak,
Are fittest auditors for such to seek,
Who to please others will themselves disgrace,
Yet please not, but affront you to your face.
A great retailer of this curious ware
Having unloaded and made many stare,
"Can this be true?" an arch observer cries,—
"Yes," rather moved, "I saw it with these eyes!"—
"Sir! I believe it on that ground alone;
I could not, had I seen it with my own."
A tale should be judicious, clear, succinct,
The language plain, and incidents well link'd;
Tell not as new what every body knows,
And, new or old, still hasten to a close;
There, cent'ring in a focus round and neat,
Let all your rays of information meet:
What neither yields us profit nor delight,
Is like a nurse's lullaby at night;
Guy Earl of Warwick and fair Eleanore,
Or giant-killing Jack, would please me more.
The pipe, with solemn interposing puff,
Makes half a sentence at a time enough;
The dozing sages drop the drowsy strain,
Then pause, and puff—and speak, and pause again.
Such often, like the tube they so admire,
Important triflers! have more smoke than fire.
Pernicious weed! whose scent the fair annoys,
Unfriendly to society's chief joys,
Thy worst effect is banishing for hours
The sex, whose presence civilizes ours:
Thou art indeed the drug a gard'ner wants
To poison vermin that infest his plants;
But are we so to wit and beauty blind,
As to despise the glory of our kind,
And shew the softest minds and fairest forms
As little mercy as he grubs and worms?
They dare not wait the riotous abuse
Thy thirst-creating steams at length produce,
When wine has given indecent language birth,
And forced the floodgates of licentious mirth;

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For sea-born Venus her attachment shows
Still to that element from which she rose,
And with a quiet, which no fumes disturb,
Sips meek infusions of a milder herb.[1]
Th' emphatic speaker dearly loves t' oppose,
In contact inconvenient, nose to nose,
As if the gnomon on his neighbour's phiz,
Touch'd with a magnet, had attracted his.
His whisper'd theme, dilated and at large,
Proves after all a wind-gun's airy charge,
An extract of his diary—no more,
A tasteless journal of the day before.
He walk'd abroad, o'ertaken in the rain,
Call'd on a friend, drank tea, stepp'd home again,
Resumed his purpose, had a world of talk
With one he stumbled on, and lost his walk.
I interrupt him with a sudden bow,
Adieu, dear Sir! lest you should lose it now.
I cannot talk with civet in the room,
A fine puss-gentleman that 's all perfume;
The sight 's enough—no need to smell a beau—
Who thrusts his nose into a raree-show?
His odoriferous attempts to please
Perhaps might prosper with a swarm of bees;
But we that make no honey, though we sting,
Poets, are sometimes apt to maul the thing.
'Tis wrong to bring into a mix'd resort
What makes some sick, and others *à-la-mort;*
An argument of cogence we may say,
Why such a one should keep himself away.
A graver coxcomb we may sometimes see,
Quite as absurd, though not so light as he;
A shallow brain behind a serious mask,
An oracle within an empty cask,
The solemn fop; significant and budge;
A fool with judges, amongst fools a judge
He says but little, and that little said
Owes all its weight, like loaded dice, to lead.
His wit invites you by his looks to come,
But when you knock, it never is at home.

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'Tis like a parcel sent you by the stage,
Some handsome present, as your hopes presage,
'Tis heavy, bulky, and bids fair to prove
An absent friend's fidelity and love;
But when unpack'd, your disappointment groans
To find it stuff'd with brickbats, earth, and stones.
  Some men employ their health—an ugly trick—
In making known how oft they have been sick,
And give us, in recitals of disease,
A doctor's trouble, but without the fees;
Relate how many weeks they kept their bed,
How an emetic or cathartic sped;
Nothing is slightly touch'd, much less forgot,
Nose, ears, and eyes, seem present on the spot.
Now the distemper, spite of draught, or pill,
Victorious seem'd, and now the doctor's skill;
And now—alas for unforeseen mishaps!—
They put on a damp nightcap and relapse;
They thought they must have died, they were so bad—
Their peevish hearers almost wish they had.
  Some fretful tempers wince at every touch,
You always do too little or too much:
You speak with life, in hopes to entertain,
Your elevated voice goes through the brain;
You fall at once into a lower key,
That's worse—the drone-pipe of a humble bee.
The southern sash admits too strong a light,
You rise and drop the curtain—now 'tis night.
He shakes with cold—you stir the fire, and strive
To make a blaze—that's roasting him alive.
Serve him with ven'son, and he chooses fish;
With soal—that's just the sort he would not wish;
He takes what he at first profess'd to loathe,
And in due time feeds heartily on both;
Yet still, o'erclouded with a constant frown,
He does not swallow, but he gulps it down.
Your hope to please him vain on every plan,
Himself should work that wonder if he can—
Alas! his efforts double his distress,
He likes yours little, and his own still less.

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Thus always teasing others, always teased,
His only pleasure is—to be displeased.
  I pity bashful men, who feel the pain
Of fancied scorn and undeserved disdain,
And bear the marks upon a blushing face
Of needless shame, and self-imposed disgrace.
Our sensibilities are so acute,
The fear of being silent makes us mute.
We sometimes think we could a speech produce
Much to the purpose, if our tongues were loose;
But being tried, it dies upon the lip,
Faint as a chicken's note that has the pip:
Our wasted oil unprofitably burns,
Like hidden lamps in old sepulchral urns.[2]
Few Frenchmen of this evil have complain'd,
It seems as if we Britons were ordain'd,
By way of wholesome curb upon our pride,
To fear each other, fearing none beside.
The cause perhaps inquiry may descry,
Self-searching with an introverted eye,
Conceal'd within an unsuspected part,
The vainest corner of our own vain heart:
For ever aiming at the world's esteem,
Our self-importance ruins its own scheme;
In other eyes our talents rarely shown,
Become at length so splendid in our own,
We dare not risk them into public view,
Lest they miscarry of what seems their due.
True modesty is a discerning grace,
And only blushes in the proper place;
But counterfeit is blind, and skulks through fear,
Where 'tis a shame to be ashamed t' appear;
Humility the parent of the first,
The last by vanity produced and nursed.
The circle form'd, we sit in silent state,
Like figures drawn upon a dial plate;
"Yes, ma'am," and, "No, ma'am," utter'd softly, show
Every five minutes how the minutes go;
Each individual suffering a constraint
Poetry may, but colours cannot paint;

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And, if in close committee on the sky,
Reports it hot or cold, or wet or dry;
And finds a changing clime a happy source
Of wise reflection, and well-timed discourse.
We next inquire, but softly and by stealth,
Like conservators of the public health,
Of epidemic throats, if such there are,
And coughs, and rheums, and phthisic, and catarrh;
That theme exhausted, a wide chasm ensues,
Fill'd up at last with interesting news,
Who danced with whom, and who are like to wed,
And who is hang'd, and who is brought to bed;
But fear to call a more important cause,
As if 't were treason against English laws.
The visit paid, with ecstasy we come,
As from a seven years' transportation, home,
And there resume an unembarrass'd brow,
Recovering what we lost we know not how,
The faculties that seem'd reduced to nought, —
Expression and the privilege of thought.
  The reeking, roaring hero of the chase,
I give him over as a desp'rate case.
Physicians write in hopes to work a cure,
Never, if honest ones, when death is sure;
And though the fox he follows may be tamed,
A mere fox follower never is reclaim'd.
Some farrier should prescribe his proper course,
Whose only fit companion is his horse,
Or if, deserving of a better doom,
The noble beast judge otherwise, his groom.
Yet e'en the rogue that serves him, though he stand,
To take his honour's orders, cap in hand,
Prefers his fellow-grooms with much good sense,
Their skill a truth, his master's a pretence.
If neither horse nor groom affect the squire,
Where can at last his jockeyship retire?
Oh, to the club, the scene of savage joys,
The school of coarse good fellowship and noise;
There, in the sweet society of those,
Whose friendship from his boyish years he chose,

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Let him improve his talent if he can,
Till none but beasts acknowledge him a man.
  Man's heart had been impenetrably seal'd,
Like theirs that cleave the flood or graze the field,
Had not his Maker's all-bestowing hand
Given him a soul, and bade him understand;
The reas'ning power vouchsafed of course inferr'd
The power to clothe that reason with his word;
For all is perfect that God works on earth,
And he that gives conception aids the birth.
If this be plain, 'tis plainly understood,
What uses of his boon the Giver would.
The mind, despatch'd upon her busy toil,
Should range where Providence has bless'd the soil;
Visiting ev'ry flower with labour meet,
And gath'ring all her treasures sweet by sweet,
She should imbue the tongue with what she sips,
And shed the balmy blessing on the lips,
That good diffused may more abundant grow,
And speech may praise the power that bids it flow.
Will the sweet warbler of the livelong night,
That fills the list'ning lover with delight,
Forget his harmony, with rapture heard,
To learn the twittering of a meaner bird;
Or make the parrot's mimicry his choice,
That odious libel on a human voice?
No—Nature unsophisticate by man,
Starts not aside from her Creator's plan;
The melody, that was at first design'd
To cheer the rude forefathers of mankind,
Is note for note deliver'd in our ears,
In the last scene of her six thousand years.
Yet fashion, leader of a chattering train,
Whom man, for his own hurt, permits to reign,
Who shifts and changes all things but his shape,
And would degrade her votary to an ape,
The fruitful parent of abuse and wrong,
Holds a usurp'd dominion o'er his tongue;
There sits and prompts him with his own disgrace,
Prescribes the theme, the tone, and the grimace,

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And, when accomplish'd in her wayward school,
Calls gentleman whom she has made a fool.
'Tis an unalterable fix'd decree,
That none could frame or ratify but she,
That heaven and hell, and righteousness and sin,
Snares in his path, and foes that lurk within,
God and his attributes, (a field of day
Where 'tis an angel's happiness to stray,)
Fruits of his love and wonders of his might,
Be never named in ears esteem'd polite.
That he who dares, when she forbids, be grave,
Shall stand proscribed, a madman or a knave,
A close designer not to be believed,
Or, if excused that charge, at least deceived.
O folly, worthy of the nurse's lap,
Give it the breast, or stop its mouth with pap!
Is it incredible, or can it seem
A dream to any, except those that dream,
That man should love his Maker, and *that* fire,
Warming his heart, should at his lips transpire?
Know then, and modestly let fall your eyes,
And veil your daring crest that braves the skies;
That air of insolence affronts your God,
You need his pardon, and provoke his rod:
Now, in a posture that becomes you more
Than that heroic strut assumed before,
Know, your arrears with every hour accrue
For mercy shewn, while wrath is justly due.
The time is short, and there are souls on earth,
Though future pain may serve for present mirth,
Acquainted with the woes that fear or shame,
By fashion taught, forbade them once to name;
And, having felt the pangs you deem a jest,
Have proved them truths too big to be express'd.
Go seek on Revelation's hallow'd ground,
Sure to succeed, the remedy they found;
Touch'd by that power that you have dared to mock,
That makes seas stable and dissolves the rock,
Your heart shall yield a life-renewing stream,
That fools, as you have done, shall call a dream.

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It happen'd on a solemn eventide,
Soon after He that was our surety died,
Two bosom friends, each pensively inclined,
The scene of all those sorrows left behind,
Sought their own village, busied as they went
In musings worthy of the great event:
They spake of Him they loved, of Him whose life,
Though blameless, had incurr'd perpetual strife,
Whose deeds had left, in spite of hostile arts,
A deep memorial graven on their hearts.
The recollection, like a vein of ore,
The farther traced, enrich'd them still the more;
They thought him, and they justly thought him, one
Sent to do more than he appear'd t' have done;
T' exalt a people, and to place them high
Above all else, and wonder'd he should die.
Ere yet they brought their journey to an end,
A stranger join'd them, courteous as a friend,
And ask'd them, with a kind, engaging air,
What their affliction was, and begg'd a share.
Inform'd, he gather'd up the broken thread,
And, truth and wisdom gracing all he said,
Explain'd, illustrated, and search'd so well
The tender theme, on which they chose to dwell,
That, reaching home, "The night," they said, "is near,
We must not now be parted—sojourn here."
The new acquaintance soon became a guest,
And, made so welcome at their simple feast,
He bless'd the bread, but vanish'd at the word,
And left them both exclaiming, "'Twas the Lord!
Did not our hearts feel all he deign'd to say?
Did not they burn within us by the way?"[3]

Now theirs was converse, such as it behoves
Man to maintain, and such as God approves:
Their views, indeed, were indistinct and dim,
But yet successful, being aim'd at Him.
Christ and his character their only scope,
Their object, and their subject, and their hope,
They felt what it became them much to feel,
And wanting Him to loose the sacred seal,

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Found Him as prompt, as their desire was true,
To spread the newborn glories in their view.
Well—what are ages and the lapse of time,
Match'd against truths, as lasting as sublime?
Can length of years on God himself exact? *
Or make that fiction, which was once a fact?
No—marble and recording brass decay,
And, like the graver's memory, pass away;
The works of man inherit, as is just,
Their author's frailty, and return to dust:
But truth divine for ever stands secure,
Its head is guarded as its base is sure;
Fix'd in the rolling flood of endless years,
The pillar of th' eternal plan appears,
The raving storm and dashing wave defies,
Built by that Architect who built the skies.
Hearts may be found, that harbour at this hour
That love of Christ in all its quick'ning power;
And lips unstain'd by folly or by strife,
Whose wisdom, drawn from the deep well of life,
Tastes of its healthful origin, and flows
A Jordan for th' ablution of our woes:
Oh, days of heaven, and nights of equal praise,
Serene and peaceful as those heavenly days,
When souls drawn upwards in communion sweet,
Enjoy the stillness of some close retreat,
Discourse, as if released and safe at home,
Of dangers past, and wonders yet to come,
And spread the sacred treasures of the breast
Upon the lap of covenanted rest.

What! always dreaming over heavenly things,
Like angel-heads in stone with pigeon-wings?
Canting and whining out all day the word,
And half the night? Fanatic and absurd!
Mine be the friend less frequent in his prayers,
Who makes no bustle with his soul's affairs,
Whose wit can brighten up a wintry day,
And chase the splenetic dull hours away;

* For this use of the word, see Psalm 80th. "The enemy shall not *exact* upon him."

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Content on earth in earthly things to shine,
Who waits for heaven ere he becomes divine,
Leaves saints t' enjoy those altitudes they teach,
And plucks the fruit placed more within his reach.
  Well spoken, advocate of sin and shame,
Known by thy bleating, Ignorance thy name.
Is sparkling wit the world's exclusive right?
The fix'd fee-simple of the vain and light?
Can hopes of heaven, bright prospects of an hour,
That come to waft us out of sorrow's power,
Obscure or quench a faculty, that finds
Its happiest soil in the serenest minds?
Religion curbs indeed its wanton play,
And brings the trifler under rigorous sway,
But gives it usefulness unknown before,
And, purifying, makes it shine the more.
A Christian's wit is inoffensive light,
A beam that aids, but never grieves the sight;
Vig'rous in age as in the flush of youth,
'Tis always active on the side of truth;
Temp'rance and peace ensure its healthful state,
And make it brightest at its latest date.
Oh, I have seen (nor hope perhaps in vain,
Ere life go down, to see such sights again)
A veteran warrior in the Christian field,
Who never saw the sword he could not wield;
Grave without dulness, learned without pride,
Exact, yet not precise, though meek, keen eyed;
A man that would have foil'd at their own play
A dozen would-be's of the modern day;
Who, when occasion justified its use,
Had wit as bright as ready to produce;
Could fetch from records of an earlier age,
Or from philosophy's enlighten'd page,
His rich materials, and regale your ear
With strains it was a privilege to hear;
Yet above all, his luxury supreme,
And his chief glory, was the Gospel theme;
There he was copious as old Greece or Rome,
His happy eloquence seem'd there at home,

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Ambitious not to shine or to excel,
But to treat justly what he loved so well.'
  It moves me more perhaps than folly ought,
When some green heads, as void of wit as thought,
Suppose *themselves* monopolists of sense,
And wiser men's ability pretence.
Though time will wear us, and we must grow old,
Such men are not forgot as soon as cold;
Their fragrant mem'ry will outlast their tomb,
Embalm'd for ever in its own perfume.
And to say truth, though in its early prime,
And when unstain'd with any grosser crime,
Youth has a sprightliness and fire to boast,
That in the valley of decline are lost,
And virtue with peculiar charms appears,
Crown'd with the garland of life's blooming years;
Yet age, by long experience well inform'd,
Well read, well temper'd, with religion warm'd,
That fire abated which impels rash youth,
Proud of his speed, to overshoot the truth,
As time improves the grape's authentic juice,
Mellows and makes the speech more fit for use,
And claims a reverence in its shortening day,
That 'tis an honour and a joy to pay.
The fruits of age, less fair, are yet more sound
Than those a brighter season pours around;
And, like the stores autumnal suns mature,
Through wintry rigours unimpair'd endure.
  What is fanatic frenzy, scorn'd so much,
And dreaded more than a contagious touch?
I grant it dangerous, and approve your fear,
That fire is catching if you draw too near:
But sage observers oft mistake the flame,
And give true piety that odious name.
To tremble (as the creature of an hour
Ought at the view of an Almighty power)
Before His presence, at whose awful throne
All tremble in all worlds, except our own,
To supplicate his mercy, love his ways,
And prize them above pleasure, wealth, or praise,

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Though common sense, allow'd a casting voice,
And free from bias, must approve the choice,
Convicts a man fanatic in th' extreme,
And wild as madness in the world's esteem.
But that disease, when soberly defined,
Is the false fire of an o'erheated mind;
It views the truth with a distorted eye,
And either warps or lays it useless by;
'Tis narrow, selfish, arrogant, and draws
Its sordid nourishment from man's applause;
And while at heart sin unrelinquish'd lies,
Presumes itself chief fav'rite of the skies.
'Tis such a light as putrefaction breeds
In fly-blown flesh, whereon the maggot feeds,
Shines in the dark, but, usher'd into day,
The stench remains, the lustre dies away.
  True bliss, if man may reach it, is composed
Of hearts in union mutually disclosed;
And, farewell else all hope of pure delight,
Those hearts should be reclaim'd, renew'd, upright.
Bad men, profaning friendship's hallow'd name,
Form, in its stead, a covenant of shame,
A dark confed'racy against the laws
Of virtue, and religion's glorious cause:
They build each other up with dreadful skill,
As bastions set point blank against God's will;
Enlarge and fortify the dread redoubt,
Deeply resolved to shut a Saviour out;
Call legions up from hell to back the deed,
And, cursed with conquest, finally succeed.
But souls that carry on a blest exchange
Of joys, they meet with in their heavenly range,
And with a fearless confidence make known
The sorrows sympathy esteems its own,
Daily derive increasing light and force
From such communion in their pleasant course,
Feel less the journey's roughness and its length,
Meet their opposers with united strength,
And, one in heart, in interest and design,
Gird up each other to the race divine.

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But Conversation, choose what theme we may,
And chiefly when religion leads the way,
Should flow like waters after summer showers,
Not as if raised by mere mechanic powers.
The Christian, in whose soul, though now distress'd,
Lives the dear thought of joys he once possess'd,
When all his glowing language issued forth
With God's deep stamp upon its current worth,
Will speak without disguise, and must impart,
Sad as it is, his undissembling heart,
Abhors constraint, and dares not feign a zeal,
Or seem to boast a fire he does not feel.
The song of Zion is a tasteless thing,
Unless, when rising on a joyful wing,
The soul can mix with the celestial bands,
And give the strain the compass it demands.
Strange tidings these to tell a world, who treat
All but their own experience as deceit!
Will they believe, though credulous enough
To swallow much upon much weaker proof,
That there are blest inhabitants of earth,
Partakers of a new ethereal birth,
Their hopes, desires, and purposes estranged
From things terrestrial, and divinely changed,
Their very language of a kind that speaks
The soul's sure interest in the good she seeks,
Who deal with Scripture, its importance felt,
As Tully with philosophy once dealt,
And in the silent watches of the night,
And through the scenes of toil-renewing light,
The social walk, or solitary ride,
Keep still the dear companion at their side? [5]
No — shame upon a self-disgracing age,
God's work may serve an ape upon a stage
With such a jest, as fill'd with hellish glee
Certain invisibles as shrewd as he;
But veneration or respect finds none,
Save from the subjects of that work alone.
The world grown old, her deep discernment shows,
Claps spectacles on her sagacious nose,

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Peruses closely the true Christian's face,
And finds it a mere mask of sly grimace;
Usurps God's office, lays his bosom bare,
And finds hypocrisy close lurking there;
And, serving God herself through mere constraint,
Concludes his unfeign'd love of him a feint.
And yet, God knows, look human nature through,
(And in due time the world shall know it too,)
That since the flowers of Eden felt the blast,
That after man's defection laid all waste,
Sincerity towards th' heart-searching God
Has made the new-born creature her abode,
Nor shall be found in unregenerate souls,
Till the last fire burn all between the poles.
Sincerity! why 'tis his only pride,
Weak and imperfect in all grace beside,
He knows that God demands his heart entire,
And gives him all his just demands require.
Without it his pretensions were as vain,
As having it he deems the world's disdain;
That great defect would cost him not alone
Man's favourable judgment, but his own;
His birthright shaken, and no longer clear,
Than while his conduct proves his heart sincere.
Retort the charge, and let the world be told
She boasts a confidence she does not hold:
That, conscious of her crimes, she feels instead
A cold misgiving, and a killing dread;
That while in health the ground of her support
Is madly to forget that life is short;
That sick she trembles, knowing she must die,
Her hope presumption, and her faith a lie;
That while she dotes, and dreams that she believes,
She mocks her Maker, and herself deceives,
Her utmost reach, historical assent,
The doctrines warp'd to what they never meant;
That truth itself is in her head as dull
And useless as a candle in a skull,
And all her love of God a groundless claim,
A trick upon the canvass, painted flame.

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Tell her again, the sneer upon her face,
And all her censures of the work of grace,
Are insincere, meant only to conceal
A dread she would not, yet is forced to feel;
That in her heart the Christian she reveres,
And while she seems to scorn him, only fears.
  A poet does not work by square or line,
As smiths and joiners perfect a design;
At least we moderns, our attention less,
Beyond th' example of our sires digress,
And claim a right to scamper and run wide,
Wherever chance, caprice, or fancy guide.
The world and I fortuitously met;
I owed a trifle, and have paid the debt;
She did me wrong, I recompensed the deed,
And, having struck the balance, now proceed.
Perhaps, however, as some years have pass'd
Since she and I conversed together last,
And I have lived recluse in rural shades,
Which seldom a distinct report pervades,
Great changes and new manners have occurr'd,
And blest reforms, that I have never heard,
And she may now be as discreet and wise,
As once absurd in all discerning eyes.
Sobriety perhaps may now be found,
Where once intoxication press'd the ground;
The subtle and injurious may be just,
And he grown chaste, that was the slave of lust;
Arts once esteem'd may be with shame dismiss'd;
Charity may relax the miser's fist;
The gamester may have cast his cards away,
Forgot to curse, and only kneel to pray.
It has indeed been told me, (with what weight,
How credibly, 'tis hard for me to state,)
That fables old, that seem'd for ever mute,
Revived, are hastening into fresh repute,
And gods and goddesses, discarded long
Like useless lumber, or a stroller's song,
Are bringing into vogue their heathen train,
And Jupiter bids fair to rule again;

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That certain feasts are instituted now,
Where Venus hears the lover's tender vow;
That all Olympus through the country roves,
To consecrate our few remaining groves,
And echo learns politely to repeat
The praise of names for ages obsolete:
That having proved the weakness, it should seem,
Of revelation's ineffectual beam,
To bring the passions under sober sway,
And give the moral springs their proper play,
They mean to try what may at last be done
By stout substantial gods of wood and stone,
And whether Roman rites may not produce
The virtues of old Rome for English use.
May such success attend the pious plan,
May Mercury once more embellish man,
Grace him again with long-forgotten arts,
Reclaim his taste, and brighten up his parts,
Make him athletic, as in days of old,
Learn'd at the bar, in the palæstra bold,
Divest the rougher sex of female airs,
And teach the softer not to copy theirs:
The change shall please, nor shall it matter aught
Who works the wonder, if it be but wrought.
'Tis time, however, if the case stands thus,
For us plain folks, and all who side with us,
To build our altar, confident and bold,
And say as stern Elijah said of old,—
The strife now stands upon a fair award,
If Israel's Lord be God, then serve the Lord;
If he be silent, faith is all a whim,
Then Baal is the God, and worship him.*

Digression is so much in modern use,
Thought is so rare, and fancy so profuse,
Some never seem so wide of their intent,
As when returning to the theme they meant;
As mendicants, whose business is to roam,
Make every parish but their own their home.

* Alluding to a taste then in vogue of erecting every where statues of the old heathen divinity.

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Though such continual zigzags in a book,
Such drunken reelings have an awkward look,
And I had rather creep to what is true,
Than rove and stagger with no mark in view;
Yet to consult a little, seem'd no crime,
The freakish humour of the present time:
But now to gather up what seems dispersed,
And touch the subject I design'd at first,
May prove, though much beside the rules of art,
Best for the public, and my wisest part.
And first, let no man charge me, that I mean
To clothe in sable every social scene,
And give good company a face severe,
As if they met around a father's bier;
For tell some men, that pleasure all their bent,
And laughter all their work, is life mispent,
Their wisdom bursts into this sage reply,
Then mirth is sin, and we should always cry.
To find the medium asks some share of wit,
And therefore 'tis a mark fools never hit.
But though life's valley be a vale of tears,
A brighter scene beyond that vale appears,
Whose glory, with a light that never fades,
Shoots between scatter'd rocks and opening shades,
And, while it shews the land the soul desires,
The language of the land she seeks inspires.
Thus touch'd, the tongue receives a sacred cure
Of all that was absurd, profane, impure;
Held within modest bounds, the tide of speech
Pursues the course that truth and nature teach;
No longer labours merely to produce
The pomp of sound, or tinkle without use:
Where'er it winds, the salutary stream,
Sprightly and fresh, enriches every theme,
While all the happy man possess'd before,
The gift of nature, or the classic store,
Is made subservient to the grand design,
For which Heaven form'd the faculty divine,
So should an idiot, while at large he strays,
Find the sweet lyre on which an artist plays,

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With rash and awkward force the chords he shakes,
And grins with wonder at the jar he makes;
But let the wise and well-instructed hand
Once take the shell beneath his just command,
In gentle sounds it seems as it complain'd
Of the rude injuries it late sustain'd,
Till, tuned at length to some immortal song,
It sounds Jehovah's name, and pours his praise along.

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RETIREMENT.

In tracing the poet's progress in these compositions, we find his own information true, "that as the season of flowers departed, his industry relaxed." Retirement, though begun in August, was not completed till the nineteenth of October, its earlier predecessors being already put to press. "My view in choosing that subject," observes the author, in his *Private Correspondence*, "is to direct to the proper use of the opportunities it affords for the cultivation of a man's best interests; to censure the vices and the follies which people carry with them into their retreats, where they make no other use of their leisure, than to gratify themselves with the indulgence of their favourite appetites, and to pay themselves by a life of pleasure for a life of business. In conclusion, I would enlarge upon the happiness of that state when discreetly enjoyed, and religiously improved." This aim he has fully accomplished. The poem has been pronounced to be the most thoroughly poetical of the series now under examination. In richness of imagery, correct, and, at the same time, picturesque language, easy and graceful versification, this is not an exaggerated estimate of the finest portions of the poem. Indeed, this poem alone is a triumphant refutation of an opinion entertained in British criticism, that practical religion cannot successfully be made the subject of poetry. The close of Retirement, though less brilliant than its commencement, must possess a tender charm for those who love the quiet of domestic life, where all its hopes point upwards, and where Christianity sheds a heavenly lustre over its humblest joys. The composition, on the whole, considered simply in relation to the genius it displays, is a noble effort, and, in some of the higher and more imaginative departments of the poetic art, raises expectations which no subsequent work of the author fully realized.

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RETIREMENT.

. . . . . studiis florens ignobilis otii. — Virg. Geor. Lib. 4.

Hackney'd in business, wearied at that oar
Which thousands, once fast chain'd to, quit no more,
But which, when life at ebb runs weak and low,
All wish, or seem to wish, they could forego;
The statesman, lawyer, merchant, man of trade,
Pants for the refuge of some rural shade,
Where, all his long anxieties forgot
Amid the charms of a sequester'd spot,
Or recollected only to gild o'er
And add a smile to what was sweet before,
He may possess the joys he thinks he sees,
Lay his old age upon the lap of ease,
Improve the remnant of his wasted span,
And, having lived a trifler, die a man.
Thus conscience pleads her cause within the breast,
Though long rebell'd against, not yet suppress'd,
And calls a creature form'd for God alone,
For heaven's high purposes, and not his own,
Calls him away from selfish ends and aims,
From what debilitates, and what inflames,
From cities humming with a restless crowd,
Sordid as active, ignorant as loud,
Whose highest praise is, that they live in vain,
The dupes of pleasure, or the slaves of gain,
Where works of man are cluster'd close around,
And works of God are hardly to be found,
To regions where, in spite of sin and woe,
Traces of Eden are still seen below,
Where mountain, river, forest, field, and grove,
Remind him of his Maker's power and love.

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'Tis well if, look'd for at so late a day,
In the last scene of such a senseless play,
True wisdom will attend his feeble call,
And grace his action ere the curtain fall.
Souls that have long despised their heavenly birth,
Their wishes all impregnated with earth,
For threescore years employ'd with ceaseless care
In catching smoke and feeding upon air,
Conversant only with the ways of men,
Rarely redeem the short remaining ten.
Inveterate habits choke th' unfruitful heart,
Their fibres penetrate its tenderest part,
And, draining its nutritious powers to feed
Their noxious growth, starve every better seed.
  Happy, if, full of days — but happier far,
If, ere we yet discern life's evening star,
Sick of the service of a world that feeds
Its patient drudges with dry chaff and weeds,
We can escape from custom's idiot sway,
To serve the sov'reign we were born t' obey.
Then sweet to muse upon His skill display'd,
Infinite skill, in all that He has made!
To trace in Nature's most minute design
The signature and stamp of power divine,
Contrivance intricate, express'd with ease,
Where unassisted sight no beauty sees,
The shapely limb and lubricated joint
Within the small dimensions of a point,
Muscle and nerve miraculously spun,
His mighty work, who speaks, and it is done,
Th' invisible in things scarce seen reveal'd,
To whom an atom is an ample field;
To wonder at a thousand insect forms,
These hatch'd, and those resuscitated worms,
New life ordain'd, and brighter scenes to share,
Once prone on earth, now buoyant upon air,
Whose shape would make them, had they bulk and size,
More hideous foes than fancy can devise;
With helmet-heads and dragon-scales adorn'd,
The mighty myriads, now securely scorn'd,

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Would mock the majesty of man's high birth,
Despise his bulwarks, and unpeople earth.
Then with a glance of fancy to survey,
Far as the faculty can stretch away,
Ten thousand rivers pour'd at His command
From urns, that never fail, through every land;
These like a deluge with impetuous force,
Those winding modestly a silent course;
The cloud-surmounting alps, the fruitful vales,
Seas, on which every nation spreads her sails;
The sun, a world whence other worlds drink light,
The crescent moon, the diadem of night;
Stars countless, each in his appointed place,
Fast anchor'd in the deep abyss of space—
At such a sight to catch the poet's flame,
And with a rapture like his own exclaim,—
"These are thy glorious works, thou Source of Good,
How dimly seen, how faintly understood!
Thine, and upheld by thy paternal care,
This universal frame, thus wondrous fair;
Thy power divine, and bounty beyond thought,
Adored and praised in all that thou hast wrought.
Absorb'd in that immensity I see,
I shrink abased, and yet aspire to thee;
Instruct me, guide me to that heavenly day,
Thy words more clearly than thy works display,
That, while thy truths my grosser thoughts refine,
I may resemble thee, and call thee mine."
O blest proficiency! surpassing all
That men erroneously their glory call,
The recompense that arts or arms can yield,
The bar, the senate, or the tented field.
Compared with this sublimest life below,
Ye kings and rulers, what have courts to show?
Thus studied, used and consecrated thus,
On earth what is, seems form'd indeed for us;
Not as the plaything of a froward child,
Fretful unless diverted and beguiled,
Much less to feed and fan the fatal fires
Of pride, ambition, or impure desires,

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But as a scale, by which the soul ascends
From mighty means to more important ends,
Securely, though by steps but rarely trod,
Mounts from inferior beings up to God,
And sees, by no fallacious light or dim,
Earth made for man, and man himself for Him.
Not that I mean t' approve, or would enforce,
A superstitious and monastic course;
Truth is not local, God alike pervades
And fills the world of traffic and the shades,
And may be fear'd amidst the busiest scenes,
Or scorn'd where business never intervenes.
But 'tis not easy with a mind like ours,
Conscious of weakness in its noblest powers,
And in a world where, other ills apart,
The roving eye misleads the careless heart,
To limit thought, by nature prone to stray
Wherever freakish fancy points the way;
To bid the pleadings of self-love be still,
Resign our own and seek our Maker's will;
To spread the page of Scripture, and compare
Our conduct with the laws engraven there;
To measure all that passes in the breast,
Faithfully, fairly, by that sacred test;
To dive into the secret deeps within,
To spare no passion and no fav'rite sin,
And search the themes, important above all,
Ourselves, and our recovery from our fall.
But leisure, silence, and a mind released
From anxious thoughts how wealth may be increased,
How to secure, in some propitious hour,
The point of int'rest, or the post of power,
A soul serene, and equally retired
From objects too much dreaded or desired,
Safe from the clamours of perverse dispute,
At least are friendly to the great pursuit.
Op'ning the map of God's extensive plan,
We find a little isle, this life of man;
Eternity's unknown expanse appears
Circling around and limiting his years;

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The busy race examine and explore
Each creek and cavern of the dangerous shore,
With care collect what in their eyes excells,
Some shining pebbles, and some weeds and shells;
Thus laden, dream that they are rich and great,
And happiest he that groans beneath his weight;
The waves o'ertake them in their serious play,
And every hour sweeps multitudes away;
They shriek and sink, survivors start and weep,
Pursue their sport, and follow to the deep;
A few forsake the throng, with lifted eyes
Ask wealth of Heaven, and gain a real prize,
Truth, wisdom, grace, and peace like that above,
Seal'd with His signet whom they serve and love;
Scorn'd by the rest, with patient hope they wait
A kind release from their imperfect state,
And unregretted are soon snatch'd away
From scenes of sorrow into glorious day.[1]
  Nor these alone prefer a life recluse,
Who seek retirement for its proper use;
The love of change, that lives in every breast,
Genius and temper, and desire of rest,
Discordant motives in one centre meet,
And each inclines its votary to retreat.
Some minds by nature are averse to noise,
And hate the tumult half the world enjoys,
The lure of avarice, or the pompous prize
That courts display before ambitious eyes;
The fruits that hang on pleasure's flowery stem,
Whate'er enchants them, are no snares to them.
To them the deep recess of dusky groves,
Or forest, where the deer securely roves,
The fall of waters, and the song of birds,
And hills that echo to the distant herds,
Are luxuries excelling all the glare
The world can boast, and her chief fav'rites share.
With eager step, and carelessly array'd,
For such a cause the poet seeks the shade,
From all he sees he catches new delight,
Pleased fancy claps her pinions at the sight,

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The rising or the setting orb of day,
The clouds that flit, or slowly float away,
Nature in all the various shapes she wears,
Frowning in storms, or breathing gentle airs;
The snowy robe her wintry state assumes,
Her summer heats, her fruits, and her perfumes,—
All, all alike transport the glowing bard,
Success in rhyme his glory and reward.
O Nature! whose Elysian scenes disclose
His bright perfections, at whose word they rose,
Next to that Power who form'd thee and sustains,
Be thou the great inspirer of my strains!
Still, as I touch the lyre, do thou expand
Thy genuine charms, and guide an artless hand,
That I may catch a fire but rarely known,
Give useful light, though I should miss renown,
And, poring on thy page, whose every line
Bears proof of an Intelligence Divine,
May feel a heart enrich'd by what it pays,
That builds its glory on its Maker's praise.
Wo to the man whose wit disclaims its use,
Glittering in vain, or only to seduce,
Who studies Nature with a wanton eye,
Admires the work, but slips the lesson by;
His hours of leisure and recess employs
In drawing pictures of forbidden joys,
Retires to blazon his own worthless name,
Or shoot the careless with a surer aim.
  The lover too shuns business and alarms,
Tender idolater of absent charms.
Saints offer nothing in their warmest prayers,
That he devotes not with a zeal like theirs;
'Tis consecration of his heart, soul, time,
And every thought that wanders is a crime.
In sighs he worships his supremely fair,
And weeps a sad libation in despair;
Adores a creature, and, devout in vain,
Wins in return an answer of disdain.
As woodbine weds the plant within her reach,
Rough elm, or smooth-grain'd ash, or glossy beech,

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In spiral rings ascends the trunk, and lays
Her golden tassels on the leafy sprays,
But does a mischief while she lends a grace,
Strait'ning its growth by such a strict embrace;
So love, that clings around the noblest minds,
Forbids th' advancement of the soul he binds;
The suitor's air, indeed, he soon improves,
And forms it to the taste of her he loves,
Teaches his eyes a language, and no less
Refines his speech, and fashions his address:
But farewell promises of happier fruits,
Manly designs, and learning's grave pursuits;
Girt with a chain he cannot wish to break,
His only bliss is sorrow for her sake;
Who will may pant for glory, and excel,
Her smile his aim, all higher aims farewell!
Thyrsis, Alexis, or whatever name
May least offend against so pure a flame,
Though sage advice of friends the most sincere
Sounds harshly in so delicate an ear,
And lovers, of all creatures, tame or wild,
Can least brook management, however mild;
Yet let a poet (poetry disarms
The fiercest animals with magic charms)
Risk an intrusion on thy pensive mood,
And woo and win thee to thy proper good.
Pastoral images and still retreats,
Umbrageous walks and solitary seats,
Sweet birds in concert with harmonious streams,
Soft airs, nocturnal vigils, and day dreams,
Are all enchantments in a case like thine,
Conspire against thy peace with one design,
Soothe thee to make thee but a surer prey,
And feed the fire that wastes thy powers away.
Up — God has form'd thee with a wiser view,
Not to be led in chains, but to subdue;
Calls thee to cope with enemies, and first
Points out a conflict with thyself, the worst
Woman, indeed, a gift he would bestow
When he design'd a Paradise below,

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The richest earthly boon his hands afford,
Deserves to be beloved, but not adored.
Post away swiftly to more active scenes,
Collect the scatter'd truths that study gleans,
Mix with the world, but with its wiser part,
No longer give an image all thine heart;
Its empire is not hers, nor is it thine,
'Tis God's just claim, prerogative divine.[2]
Virtuous and faithful HEBERDEN, whose skill
Attempts no task it cannot well fulfil,
Gives melancholy up to nature's care,
And sends the patient into purer air.
Look where he comes — in this embower'd alcove
Stand close conceal'd, and see a statue move:
Lips busy, and eyes fix'd, foot falling slow,
Arms hanging idly down, hands clasp'd below,
Interpret to the marking eye distress,
Such as its symptoms can alone express.
That tongue is silent now; that silent tongue
Could argue once, could jest or join the song,
Could give advice, could censure or commend,
Or charm the sorrows of a drooping friend.
Renounced alike its office and its sport,
Its brisker and its graver strains fall short;
Both fail beneath a fever's secret sway,
And like a summer brook are past away.
This is a sight for pity to peruse,
Till she resemble faintly what she views,
Till sympathy contract a kindred pain,
Pierced with the woes that she laments in vain.
This, of all maladies that man infest,
Claims most compassion, and receives the least;
Job felt it, when he groan'd beneath the rod
And the barb'd arrows of a frowning God;
And such emollients as his friends could spare,
Friends such as his for modern Jobs prepare.
Blest, rather curst, with hearts that never feel,
Kept snug in caskets of close-hammer'd steel,
With mouths made only to grin wide and eat,
And minds that deem derided pain a treat,

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With limbs of British oak, and nerves of wire,
And wit that puppet-prompters might inspire,
Their sov'reign nostrum is a clumsy joke
On pangs enforced with God's severest stroke.
But with a soul that ever felt the sting
Of sorrow, sorrow is a sacred thing;
Not to molest, or irritate, or raise
A laugh at his expense, is slender praise:
He that has not usurp'd the name of man,
Does all, and deems too little all, he can,
T' assuage the throbbings of the fester'd part,
And stanch the bleedings of a broken heart.
'Tis not, as heads that never ache suppose,
Forgery of fancy, and a dream of woes;
Man is a harp, whose chords elude the sight,
Each yielding harmony disposed aright;
The screws reversed, (a task which if he please,
God in a moment executes with ease,)
Ten thousand thousand strings at once go loose,
Lost, till he tune them, all their power and use.
Then neither heathy wilds, nor scenes as fair
As ever recompensed the peasant's care,
Nor soft declivities with tufted hills,
Nor view of waters turning busy mills,
Parks in which art preceptress nature weds,
Nor gardens interspersed with flowery beds,
Nor gales, that catch the scent of blooming groves,
And waft it to the mourner as he roves,
Can call up life into his faded eye,
That passes all he sees unheeded by;
No wounds like those a wounded spirit feels,
No cure for such, till God, who makes them, heals.
And thou, sad sufferer under nameless ill,
That yields not to the touch of human skill,
Improve the kind occasion, understand
A Father's frown, and kiss his chast'ning hand.
To thee the dayspring and the blaze of noon,
The purple evening and resplendent moon,
The stars that, sprinkled o'er the vault of night,
Seem drops descending in a shower of light,
Shine not, or undesired and hated shine,
Seen through the medium of a cloud like thine:

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Yet seek Him, in His favour life is found,
All bliss beside — a shadow or a sound:
Then heaven, eclipsed so long, and this dull earth,
Shall seem to start into a second birth;
Nature, assuming a more lovely face,
Borrowing a beauty from the works of grace,
Shall be despised and overlook'd no more,
Shall fill thee with delights unfelt before,
Impart to things inanimate a voice,
And bid her mountains and her hills rejoice;
The sound shall run along the winding vales,
And thou enjoy an Eden ere it fails.[3]

Ye groves, (the statesman at his desk exclaims,
Sick of a thousand disappointed aims,)
My patrimonial treasure and my pride,
Beneath your shades your gray possessor hide,
Receive me languishing for that repose
The servant of the public never knows.
Ye saw me once (ah, those regretted days,
When boyish innocence was all my praise!)
Hour after hour delightfully allot
To studies then familiar, since forgot,
And cultivate a taste for ancient song,
Catching its ardour as I mused along;
Nor seldom, as propitious Heaven might send,
What once I valued and could boast — a friend,
Were witnesses how cordially I press'd
His undissembling virtue to my breast;
Receive me now, not incorrupt as then,
Nor guiltless of corrupting other men,
But versed in arts, that, while they seem to stay
A falling empire, hasten its decay.
To the fair haven of my native home,
The wreck of what I was, fatigued I come;
For once I can approve the patriot's voice,
And make the course he recommends my choice:
We meet at last in one sincere desire,
His wish and mine both prompt me to retire.
'Tis done — he steps into the welcome chaise,
Lolls at his ease behind four handsome bays,
That whirl away from business and debate
The disencumber'd Atlas of the state.

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Ask not the boy, who, when the breeze of morn
First shakes the glittering drops from every thorn,
Unfolds his flock, then under bank or bush
Sits linking cherry-stones, or platting rush,
How fair is freedom—he was always free:
To carve his rustic name upon a tree,
To snare the mole, or with ill-fashioned hook
To draw th' incautious minnow from the brook,
Are life's prime pleasures in his simple view,
His flock the chief concern he ever knew:
She shines but little in his heedless eyes,
The good we never miss we rarely prize:
But ask the noble drudge in state affairs,
Escaped from office and its constant cares,
What charms he sees in freedom's smile express'd,
In freedom lost so long, now repossess'd;
The tongue, whose strains were cogent as commands,
Revered at home, and felt in foreign lands,
Shall own itself a stammerer in that cause,
Or plead its silence as its best applause.
He knows, indeed, that whether dress'd or rude,
Wild without art or artfully subdued,
Nature in every form inspires delight,
But never mark'd her with so just a sight.
Her hedge-row shrubs, a variegated store,
With woodbine and wild roses mantled o'er,
Green balks and furrow'd lands, the stream that spreads
Its cooling vapour o'er the dewy meads,
Downs, that almost escape th' inquiring eye,
That melt and fade into the distant sky,
Beauties he lately slighted as he pass'd,
Seem all created since he travell'd last.
Master of all th' enjoyments he design'd,
No rough annoyance rankling in his mind,
What early philosophic hours he keeps,
How regular his meals, how sound he sleeps!
Not sounder he, that on the mainmast head,
While morning kindles with a windy red,
Begins a long look-out for distant land,
Nor quits till evening-watch his giddy stand,
Then swift descending with a seaman's haste,
Slips to his hammock, and forgets the blast.

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He chooses company, but not the squire's,
Whose wit is rudeness, whose good-breeding tires;
Nor yet the parson's, who would gladly come,
Obsequious when abroad, though proud at home;
Nor can he much affect the neighbouring peer,
Whose toe of emulation treads too near;
But wisely seeks a more convenient friend,
With whom, dismissing forms, he may unbend!
A man, whom marks of condescending grace
Teach, while they flatter him, his proper place;
Who comes when call'd, and at a word withdraws,
Speaks with reserve, and listens with applause:
Some plain mechanic, who, without pretence
To birth or wit, nor gives nor takes offence;
On whom he rests well pleased his weary powers,
And talks and laughs away his vacant hours.
The tide of life, swift always in its course,
May run in cities with a brisker force,
But no where with a current so serene,
Or half so clear, as in the rural scene.
Yet how fallacious is all earthly bliss,
What obvious truths the wisest heads may miss;
Some pleasures live a month, and some a year,
But short the date of all we gather here;
No happiness is felt, except the true,
That does not charm the more for being new.
This observation, as it chanced, not made,
Or, if the thought occurr'd, not duly weigh'd,
He sighs—for, after all, by slow degrees
The spot he loved has lost the power to please;
To cross his ambling pony day by day,
Seems at the best but dreaming life away;
The prospect, such as might enchant despair,
He views it not, or sees no beauty there;
With aching heart, and discontented looks,
Returns at noon to billiards or to books,
But feels, while grasping at his faded joys,
A secret thirst of his renounced employs.
He chides the tardiness of every post,
Pants to be told of battles won or lost,
Blames his own indolence, observes, though late,
'Tis criminal to leave a sinking state,

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Flies to the levee, and, received with grace,
Kneels, kisses hands, and shines again in place.
  Suburban villas, highway-side retreats,
That dread th' encroachment of our growing streets,
Tight boxes neatly sash'd, and in a blaze
With all a July sun's collected rays,
Delight the citizen, who, gasping there,
Breathes clouds of dust, and calls it country air.
O sweet retirement, who would balk the thought,
That could afford retirement, or could not?
'Tis such an easy walk, so smooth and straight,
The second milestone fronts the garden gate;
A step if fair, and, if a shower approach,
You find safe shelter in the next stage-coach.
There, prison'd in a parlour snug and small,
Like bottled wasps upon a southern wall,
The man of business and his friends compress'd
Forget their labours, and yet find no rest;
But still 'tis rural—trees are to be seen
From every window, and the fields are green;
Ducks paddle in the pond before the door,
And what could a remoter scene shew more?
A sense of elegance we rarely find
The portion of a mean or vulgar mind,
And ignorance of better things makes man,
Who cannot much, rejoice in what he can;
And he that deems his leisure well bestow'd
In contemplation of a turnpike-road,
Is occupied as well, employs his hours
As wisely, and as much improves his powers,
As he that slumbers in pavilions graced
With all the charms of an accomplish'd taste.
Yet hence, alas! insolvencies; and hence
Th' unpitied victim of ill-judged expense,
From all his wearisome engagements freed,
Shakes hands with business, and retires indeed.
  Your prudent grandmammas, ye modern belles,
Content with Bristol, Bath, and Tunbridge Wells,
When health required it would consent to roam,
Else more attach'd to pleasures found at home.
But now alike, gay widow, virgin, wife,
Ingenious to diversify dull life,

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In coaches, chaises, caravans, and hoys,
Fly to the coast for daily, nightly joys;
And all, impatient of dry land, agree
With one consent to rush into the sea.—
Ocean exhibits, fathomless and broad,
Much of the power and majesty of God:
He swathes about the swelling of the deep,
That shines and rests, as infants smile and sleep,
Vast as it is, it answers as it flows
The breathings of the lighest air that blows;
Curling and whitening over all the waste,
The rising waves obey th' increasing blast,
Abrupt and horrid as the tempest roars,
Thunder and flash upon the steadfast shores,
Till He, that rides the whirlwind, checks the rein,
Then all the world of waters sleeps again.[4]—
Nereids or Dryads, as the fashion leads,
Now in the floods, now panting in the meads,
Votaries of pleasure still, where'er she dwells,
Near barren rocks, in palaces, or cells,
Oh, grant a poet leave to recommend
(A poet fond of nature, and your friend)
Her slighted works to your admiring view;
Her works must needs excel, who fashion'd you.
Would ye, when rambling in your morning ride,
With some unmeaning coxcomb at your side,
Condemn the prattler for his idle pains,
To waste unheard the music of his strains,
And, deaf to all th' impertinence of tongue,
That, while it courts, affronts and does you wrong,
Mark well the finish'd plan without a fault,
The seas globose and huge, th' o'erarching vault,
Earth's millions daily fed, a world employ'd
In gathering plenty yet to be enjoy'd,
Till gratitude grew vocal in the praise
Of God, beneficent in all His ways;
Graced with such wisdom, how would beauty shine!
Ye want but that to seem indeed divine.
  Anticipated rents, and bills unpaid,
Force many a shining youth into the shade,
Not to redeem his time, but his estate,
And play the fool, but at a cheaper rate.

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There, hid in loathed obscurity, removed
From pleasures left, but never more beloved,
He just endures, and with a sickly spleen
Sighs o'er the beauties of the charming scene.
Nature indeed looks prettily in rhyme,
Streams tinkle sweetly in poetic chime:
The warblings of the blackbird, clear and strong,
Are musical enough in Thomson's song;
And Cobham's groves, and Windsor's green retreats,
When Pope describes them, have a thousand sweets;
He likes the country, but in truth must own
Most likes it when he studies it in town.
Poor Jack—no matter who; for when I blame
I pity, and must therefore sink the name—
Lived in his saddle, loved the chase, the course,
And always, ere he mounted, kiss'd his horse.
The estate his sires had own'd in ancient years
Was quickly distanced, match'd against a peer's.
Jack vanish'd, was regretted and forgot—
'Tis wild good-nature's never-failing lot.
At length, when all had long supposed him dead,
By cold submersion, razor, rope, or lead,
My lord, alighting at his usual place,
The Crown, took notice of an ostler's face.
Jack knew his friend, but hoped in that disguise
He might escape the most observing eyes,
And whistling, as if unconcern'd and gay,
Curried his nag, and look'd another way.
Convinced at last, upon a nearer view,
'Twas he—the same—the very Jack he knew.
O'erwhelm'd at once with wonder, grief, and joy,
He press'd him much to quit his base employ;
His countenance, his purse, his heart, his hand,
Influence and power, were all at his command:
Peers are not always generous as well-bred,
But Granby was, meant truly what he said,
Jack bow'd, and was obliged—confess'd 'twas strange,
That so retired he should not wish a change,
But knew no medium between guzzling beer,
And his old stint—three thousand pounds a-year
Thus some retire to nourish hopeless woe:
Some seeking happiness not found below;

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Some to comply with humour, and a mind
To social scenes by nature disinclined;
Some sway'd by fashion, some by deep disgust;
Some self-impov'rish'd, and because they must:
But few that court Retirement are aware
Of half the toils they must encounter there.
  Lucrative offices are seldom lost
For want of powers proportion'd to the post:
Give e'en a dunce th' employment he desires,
And he soon finds the talents it requires;
A business with an income at his heels
Furnishes always oil for its own wheels.
But in his arduous enterprise to close
His active years with indolent repose,
He finds the labours of that state exceed
His utmost faculties, severe indeed.
'Tis easy to resign a toilsome place,
But not to manage leisure with a grace;
Absence of occupation is not rest,
A mind quite vacant is a mind distress'd.
The veteran steed, excused his task at length,
In kind compassion of his failing strength,
And turn'd into the park or mead to graze,
Exempt from future service all his days,
There feels a pleasure perfect in its kind,
Ranges at liberty, and snuffs the wind:
But when his lord would quit the busy road,
To taste a joy like that he has bestow'd,
He proves, less happy than his favour'd brute,
A life of ease a difficult pursuit:
Thought, to the man who never thinks, may seem
As natural as when asleep to dream;
But reveries (for human minds will act)
Specious in show, impossible in fact,
Those flimsy webs, that break as soon as wrought,
Attain not to the dignity of thought;
Nor yet the swarms that occupy the brain,
Where dreams of dress, intrigue, and pleasure reign;
Nor such as useless conversation breeds,
Or lust engenders, and indulgence feeds.
Whence, and what are we? to what end ordain'd?
What means the drama by the world sustain'd?

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Business or vain amusement, care or mirth,
Divide the frail inhabitants of earth.
Is duty a mere sport, or an employ?
Life an intrusted talent, or a toy?
Is there, as reason, conscience, Scripture, say,
Cause to provide for a great future day,
When, earth's assign'd duration at an end,
Man shall be summon'd and the dead attend?
The trumpet—will it sound? the curtain rise?
And shew th' august tribunal of the skies,
Where no prevarication shall avail,
Where eloquence and artifice shall fail,
The pride of arrogant distinctions fall,
And conscience and our conduct judge us all?
Pardon me, ye that give the midnight oil
To learned cares, or philosophic toil,
Though I revere your honourable names,
Your useful labours and important aims,
And hold the world indebted to your aid,
Enrich'd with the discoveries ye have made;
Yet let me stand excused, if I esteem
A mind employ'd on so sublime a theme,
Pushing her bold inquiry to the date
And outline of the present transient state,
And, after poising her adventurous wings,
Settling at last upon eternal things,
Far more intelligent, and better taught
The strenuous use of profitable thought,
Than ye, when happiest and enlighten'd most,
And highest in renown, can justly boast.
  A mind unnerved, or indisposed to bear
The weight of subjects worthiest of her care,
Whatever hopes a change of scene inspires,
Must change her nature, or in vain retires.
An idler is a watch that wants both hands,
As useless if it goes, as when it stands.
Books therefore, not the scandal of the shelves,
In which lewd sensualists print out themselves;
Nor those, in which the stage gives vice a blow,
With what success let modern manners show;
Nor his, who, for the bane of thousands born,
Built God a church, and laugh'd his word to scorn,

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Skilful alike to seem devout and just,
And stab religion with a sly side-thrust;
Nor those of learn'd philologists, who chase
A panting syllable through time and space.
Start it at home, and hunt it in the dark,
To Gaul, to Greece, and into Noah's ark;
But such as learning without false pretence,
The friend of truth, th' associate of sound sense,
And such as, in the zeal of good design,
Strong judgment labouring in the Scripture mine,
All such as manly and great souls produce,
Worthy to live, and of eternal use;
Behold in these what leisure hours demand,—
Amusement and true knowledge hand in hand.
Luxury gives the mind a childish cast,
And, while she polishes, perverts the taste;
Habits of close attention, thinking heads,
Become more rare as dissipation spreads,
Till authors hear at length one general cry,—
Tickle and entertain us, or we die.
The loud demand, from year to year the same,
Beggars invention, and makes fancy lame,
Till farce itself, most mournfully jejune,
Calls for the kind assistance of a tune;
And novels (witness every month's review)
Belie their name, and offer nothing new.
The mind, relaxing into needful sport,
Should turn to writers of an abler sort,
Whose wit well managed, and whose classic style,
Give truth a lustre, and make wisdom smile.
Friends (for I cannot stint, as some have done,
Too rigid in my view, that name to one—
Though one, I grant it, in the generous breast
Will stand advanced a step above the rest:
Flowers by that name promiscuously we call,
But one, the rose, the regent of them all)—
Friends, not adopted with a schoolboy's haste,
But chosen with a nice discerning taste,
Well born, well disciplined, who, placed apart
From vulgar minds, have honour much at heart,
And, though the world may think the ingredients odd,
The love of virtue, and the fear of God!

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Such friends prevent what else would soon succeed,
A temper rustic as the life we lead,
And keep the polish of the manners clean
As theirs who bustle in the busiest scene:
For solitude, however some may rave,
Seeming a sanctuary, proves a grave,
A sepulchre in which the living lie,
Where all good qualities grow sick and die.
I praise the Frenchman,* his remark was shrewd—
"How sweet, how passing sweet, is solitude!
But grant me still a friend in my retreat,
Whom I may whisper, Solitude is sweet."
Yet neither these delights, nor aught beside,
That appetite can ask, or wealth provide,
Can save us always from a tedious day,
Or shine the dulness of still life away:
Divine communion, carefully enjoy'd,
Or sought with energy, must fill the void.
O sacred art! to which alone life owes
Its happiest seasons, and a peaceful close,
Scorn'd in a world, indebted to that scorn
For evils daily felt and hardly borne,
Not knowing thee, we reap with bleeding hands
Flowers of rank odour upon thorny lands,
And, while experience cautions us in vain,
Grasp seeming happiness, and find it pain.
Despondence, self-deserted in her grief,
Lost by abandoning her own relief,
Murmuring and ungrateful discontent,
That scorns afflictions mercifully meant,
Those humours, tart as wines upon the fret,
Which idleness and weariness beget;
These, and a thousand plagues that haunt the breast,
Fond of the phantom of an earthly rest,
Divine communion chases, as the day
Drives to their dens th' obedient beasts of prey.
See Judah's promised king, bereft of all,
Driven out an exile from the face of Saul.
To distant caves the lonely wanderer flies,
To seek that peace a tyrant's frown denies.

* The author here refers in a note to La Bruyere. The remark occurs also in Rousseau, but the former claims the priority in time.

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Hear the sweet accents of his tuneful voice,
Hear him, o'erwhelm'd with sorrow, yet rejoice;
No womanish or wailing grief has part,
No, not a moment, in his royal heart;
'Tis manly music, such as martyrs make,
Suffering with gladness for a Saviour's sake;
His soul exults, hope animates his lays,
The sense of mercy kindles into praise,
And wilds, familiar with a lion's roar,
Ring with ecstatic sounds unheard before:
'Tis love like his that can alone defeat
The foes of man, or make a desert sweet.

Religion does not censure or exclude
Unnumber'd pleasures harmlessly pursued;
To study culture, and with artful toil
To meliorate and tame the stubborn soil;
To give dissimilar yet fruitful lands
The grain, or herb, or plant that each demands;
To cherish virtue in a humble state,
And share the joys your bounty may create;
To mark the matchless workings of the power
That shuts within its seed the future flower,
Bid these in elegance of form excel,
In colour these, and those delight the smell,
Sends Nature forth the daughter of the skies,
To dance on earth and charm all human eyes;
To teach the canvass innocent deceit,
Or lay the landscape on the snowy sheet,—
These, these are arts pursued without a crime,
That leave no stain upon the wing of Time.

Me poetry (or rather notes that aim
Feebly and vainly at poetic fame)
Employs, shut out from more important views,
Fast by the banks of the slow winding Ouse;
Content if thus sequester'd I may raise
A monitor's though not a poet's praise,
And while I teach an art too little known,
To close life wisely, may not waste my own.

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THE TASK.

"ADVERTISEMENT.—The history of the following production is briefly this:—A lady, fond of blank verse, demanded a poem of that kind from the author, and gave him the SOFA for a subject. He obeyed, and having much leisure, connected another subject with it; and preserving the train of thought to which his situation and turn of mind led him, brought forth at length, instead of the trifle which he at first intended, a serious affair—a volume."

Such is the modest account of its name and origin with which Cowper introduced this noble poem to the world. It may be necessary to remind the reader, that the allusion is to Lady Austen; and that the undertaking thus gently imposed, occupied in its completion nearly fourteen months, from June or July, 1783, to October, 1784, when the manuscripts were sent to press, though the work did not appear till the succeeding summer.

During almost a century previous to the publication of the Task, a poetical school had dominated, which may be termed the Classical, inasmuch as its principles of composition and maxims of taste were derived more from the usage of the ancients, than framed in obedience to the peculiarities and genius of the native idiom, or adapted to seek and to find its materials in the national manners and modes of thinking. The system hung a dead weight upon the fancy—taste was exercised rather than genius displayed—and merit consisted more in the absence of what offended in others, than in the presence of that which charmed from its own native freshness.

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Hence, though some of the most splendid names in the annals of letters adorned our poetry, England could scarcely be said to possess a single poem descriptive of national manners and home scenes, till the publication of Cowper's great work. Nay, even in language hardly had we a poet truly British, who yielded himself up to the unrestrained flow of the national numbers, or who would not hesitate to adopt a word if it expressed his meaning, though it might not have received the stamp of poetical, that is conventional usage. We do not intend in this to magnify his powers, or overrate the debt which living poetry owes to our present subject: on the contrary, English genius had long previously been but as a Goliah in fetters, playing constrained feats, and unequal to a far inferior strength in one who should first dare to cast from him the intellectual chains imposed by the practice of his predecessors. Cowper had the courage, or the good fortune, to vindicate for himself the full privileges of language and nature. At first, indeed, the classic system still enchained his admiration—his juvenile pieces are composed in that style—and in manner, at least, even his earlier volume belongs more to the preceding school than to his own; but in its best compositions we discover also successful innovation upon monotony and false refinement. We find a vigour, a freshness, an originality of thought and description, with a natural, an unstudied force of idiomatic expression, and even a colloquial familiarity of verse, which had long been banished, or never previously received into the service of the muses. The praise, then, of having knowingly and boldly struck into a path traced by his own genius through the untrodden scenery of nature, may hardly be denied to Cowper; for we can note his systematic deviations from the beaten track, and placing ourselves in his position, can descry the distant landmarks which conducted him onwards to the high places of poesy. Doubtless such was the taste of his own age, and in some respects such is still the taste of ours, that these his earlier exertions would have failed to make an impression,—unsupported by the Task they would have sunk, though possessing some of the finest requisites of buoyance in themselves; and through the latter alone may his admirers fully claim for him the highest meed of genius,—the praise of invention, and the honour of being the most conspicuous founder of a new and influential school of national poetry.

This distinction is now shared with others, whose claims are

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allowed. But to Cowper belongs the merit of having made the first impression on the public mind. And if to extend the power of reality over fiction, yet enlarge the empire of fancy, by opening fresh sources of natural imagery and sentiment—if to add novelty to that which is common, and interest to what is ordinary—if to discard conventional language, and animate verse with the variety, the strength, and even the familiarity of prose, constitute a literary reformation,—then does the publication of the Task mark an important and brilliant era in the later annals of English literature.

Like almost all who have laboured to bring back taste from a state of high artificial refinement to simplicity and truth, Cowper has been accused of irregularity and of coarseness. That in seeking to avoid one extreme, he may have occasionally fallen into the opposite, may be the case; but it is not true, as has been alleged, that his great work is throughout defective in methodical construction. The merely incidental origin of the Task may at first have occasioned some looseness of idea in the writer's conceptions as to its divisions and final object. The knowledge of this fact, confessed by himself on the appearance of the poem, was certainly calculated to countenance, and probably it suggested, this main objection. Now it is not easy either to apprehend the justice of the criticism on special grounds, or to admit generally the necessity of a decided plan in a poem avowedly descriptive, and consequently discursive. The very subject proposed allowed to the poet unrestricted freedom in the choice, and every variety in the mode of treating his themes. Seated in imagination beside him on the Sofa, we enter fully into all the allusions, changes, breaks, and connections of the discourse. We readily feel that the very quiet of home around us renders, by contrast, the transitions to the bustle of the world without, both natural and pleasing. Where, again, could "rural sights and rural sounds" be more appropriately the subjects of remark than amid the smiling scenes and cheerful animation of country life? Or, what more consistent than that one, fond of innocent recreation and healthful exercise, should entertain us with gardening, or carry us with him to his walks, his views, and his trees? How closely, too, and how sweetly, is the original theme connected with the "intimate delights" of domestic retirement? and we appeal to every soul of sensibility to attest the power, the charm, and the veracity of this portion of the Task. Thus even externally the regular succession of subject is beautiful. We

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look, indeed, from the loop-holes of personal retreat upon the turmoil or the vices which are abroad; and it is confessed, also, that we walk forth into the scenery of local nature: but our conductor is embued with the omnipotency of genius—his touch is truth; and whatever is true to nature and to human feeling, in any one situation, has interest in all. Hence it is, that, surrounded as we are by individuality, the heart is never more intensely alive to the universal loveliness of nature—to all that is most affecting in the moral world, than when we are reading the pages of Cowper.

It is this very individuality, in fact, that imparts its impressiveness and fascination to the verse. Whatever is individual to the poet, we love, because we admire his character: if the individuality be that of English life, it affects us with the proud consciousness that the same is true of ten thousand hearths, encircled by sanctity and happiness—a consciousness which makes their country the heart's home of Britons, and renders that country unparalleled in all the world. Away, then, as applied to such a work, with the prescriptions of a cold and artificial criticism. Plan! it is Nature's,—the association of great principles, uniting diversity of particular details, blended and wrought into one harmonious and touching whole. These leading principles, too, are of the noblest interest,—the love of God—the love of nature—and the love of man. These glorious themes pervade and animate the entire poem, while they consolidate its richness of diversified illustration. They are the circlets of precious ore which gently blend into one brilliant diadem the varied splendour of separate gems.

Again, the beauty of individual transition is one of Cowper's happiest merits. He neither paralyzes the fancy by too logical or marked distinctions, nor does he crowd his various topics upon the attention, without any connecting link by which they may arrange themselves in the memory. The intellectual gradations by which one train of thought melts into a new succession of ideas, are often, indeed, faint in their original differences, and blend so imperceptibly, as to bear us into a fresh topic before we are aware of having passed from the old one. At the same time, the judgment, on deliberation, is rarely, if ever, left unsatisfied, or incapable of tracing the progress of transition; frequently, on the contrary, a gentle and pleasing surprise is the effect of such retrospective inquiries. Description, we perceive, introduces reflection, while reflection in turn leads to description; and it gratifies us

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to find art so perfect in contrivance yet so unobtrusive in effect.

The language and versification of the Task are happily adapted to the nature of the subjects. They are sustained, yet varied; simple and even familiar, but throughout sufficiently dignified; and on proper occasions sublime. In these respects, Cowper's manner was not less a novelty in the national literature than his general conceptions. From the period of the Restoration, no poet had exhibited a purity of style so genuine; and few successors have approached his idiomatic turn—his lofty, almost stern, rejection of all innovations on the masculine tone of the language. If from his great work any passage be selected, it will be found to contain a larger proportion of Saxon primitives than any equal portion of verse since the days of Paradise Lost. It is this chiefly which renders the writings of Cowper so remarkable for the union of brevity with high poetical expression. These, the true originals of the language, not only constitute its strength, but they represent also its sweetest associations, comprise its terms of tenderest import, and are most nobly descriptive of the characteristics of nature; they are besides less encumbered with the abstractions of science, or contaminated by peculiar applications, than Latin and French derivatives. By the exquisite selection of the words which he thus employs, Cowper has preserved the antique simplicity, and the sweet artlessness of an early dialect, amid the refinements of an advanced age. But it is not merely his choice that is admirable; his combinations have a certain delightful charm, more readily felt than explained, by which expressions, apparently the least striking, acquire an effect of the truest eloquence. In no subject of taste, however, do the extremes of beauty and defect, of dignity and vulgarity, more readily coincide than in poetical language. From not adverting to this, Cowper has overstepped the limits of his own excellent system. In his anxiety to express every sentiment simply, naturally, and in pure English words in common use, he has sometimes adopted vulgar, quaint, and obsolete expressions, altogether unworthy of his numbers. Occasionally some of his most beautiful passages are disfigured by a colloquial phrase; and in the very height of our admiration, in our deepest intensity of feeling, a single word often mars the full effect, and recals our sympathy by a painful revulsion of sentiment.

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Cowper possessed from nature an ear finely attuned to the melody of language. The blank verse of the Task is accordingly harmonious, but it is not uniformly harmonious. He entertained a not uncommon idea, that an occasional unmusical cadence, or negligent arrangement, in a passage was desirable, in order to break the monotony. The theory is a false one. Imperfection can never be desirable, least of all in poetry, whose variety ought to be the alternations of varied excellence. He conceived also that the greatness of his themes, in some instances, rejected the external ornaments of exquisitely attuned language, while in others, contempt of the objects of his satire has induced a disregard of expression. In the Task, however, there still remains a magnificent system of versification, embracing all that is closest, most vigorous, and descriptive in the strength, and much of what is most harmonious in the melody of the English tongue. In the structure of his verse, Cowper has followed no master: he is an inventor here also. If he be less uniformly majestic than the Miltonic school, he has escaped the monotony of Thomson and the abruptness of Young. The pauses of his lines, if not disposed with much nice art—a quality foreign alike to the subjects and to his own genius—are yet sufficiently varied for the effects which he aimed at producing. Generally speaking, the reader will perceive that the rest falls upon the third foot, imparting lightness and familiarity of flow; and on the seventh, which gives dignity to the march of the verse.

All this, however, is but the dead letter; the living spirit of Cowper's poetry dwells in the inspiration of religion. To this it owes the charm by which it attracts the serious mind; and from this, like a source which, though unperceived in itself, is traced by its verdure, and its flowers, and its freshness, spring up also those beauties which delight the man of mere refinement and literary taste. Of all men of genius, Cowper perhaps united the largest share of the sentiment of personal holiness with his studies. His poetry was a religious exercise; thence, as perfume from a concealed bank of sweets, a purity breathes over his page, calming and refreshing the mind, while it delights the sense. Religion was to him the business of his poetical existence; and he, of all our writers, goes nearest to render it the great object for which his readers wish to live.

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THE TASK.

BOOK I.

THE SOFA.

ARGUMENT OF THE FIRST BOOK.

Historical deduction of seats, from the stool to the sofa. — A Schoolboy's ramble. — A walk in the country. — The scene described. — Rural sounds as well as sights delightful. — Another walk. — Mistake concerning the charms of solitude corrected. — Colonnades commended. — Alcove, and the view from it. — The wilderness. — The grove. — The thresher. — The necessity and the benefits of exercise. — The works of nature superior to, and in some instances inimitable by, art. — The wearisomeness of what is commonly called a life of pleasure. — Change of scene sometimes expedient. — A common described, and the character of crazy Kate introduced.— Gipsies. — The blessings of a civilized life. — The state most favourable to virtue. — The South Sea islanders compassionated, but chiefly Omai. — His present state of mind supposed. — Civilized life friendly to virtue, but not great cities.— Great cities, and London in particular, allowed their due praises, but censured. — Fete champetre. — The book concludes with a reflection on the fatal effects of dissipation and effeminacy upon our public measures.

I SING the SOFA. I, who lately sang
Truth, Hope, and Charity, and touch'd with awe
The solemn chords, and with a trembling hand,
Escaped with pain from that adventurous flight,
Now seek repose upon an humbler theme;
The theme though humble, yet august and proud
Th' occasion — for the fair commands the song.
  Time was, when clothing sumptuous or for use,
Save their own painted skins, our sires had none.
As yet black breeches were not; satin smooth,
Or velvet soft, or plush with shaggy pile:
The hardy chief upon the rugged rock
Wash'd by the sea, or on the gravelly bank
Thrown up by wintry torrents roaring loud,
Fearless of wrong, reposed his wearied strength.

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Those barbarous ages past, succeeded next
The birth-day of invention; weak at first,
Dull in design, and clumsy to perform.
Joint-stools were then created; on three legs
Upborne they stood. Three legs upholding firm
A massy slab, in fashion square or round.
On such a stool immortal Alfred sat,
And sway'd the sceptre of his infant realms;
And such in ancient halls and mansions drear
May still be seen, but perforated sore,
And drill'd in holes, the solid oak is found,
By worms voracious eating through and through.
At length a generation more refined
Improved the simple plan; made three legs four,
Gave them a twisted form vermicular,
And o'er the seat, with plenteous wadding stuff'd,
Induced a splendid cover, green and blue,
Yellow and red, of tapestry richly wrought
And woven close, or needlework sublime.
There might ye see the piony spread wide,
The full-blown rose, the shepherd and his lass,
Lapdog and lambkin with black staring eyes,
And parrots with twin cherries in their beak.
Now came the cane from India, smooth and bright
With nature's varnish, sever'd into stripes,
That interlaced each other, these supplied
Of texture firm a lattice work, that braced
The new machine, and it became a chair.
But restless was the chair; the back erect
Distress'd the weary loins, that felt no ease;
The slippery seat betray'd the sliding part,
That press'd it, and the feet hung dangling down,
Anxious in vain to find the distant floor.[1]
These for the rich; the rest, whom fate had placed
In modest mediocrity, content
With base materials, sat on well-tann'd hides.
Obdurate and unyielding, glassy smooth,
With here and there a tuft of crimson yarn,
Or scarlet crewel, in the cushion fix'd,
If cushion might be call'd, what harder seem'd
Than the firm oak, of which the frame was form'd.

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No want of timber then was felt or fear'd
In Albion's happy isle. The lumber stood
Pond'rous and fix'd by its own massy weight.
But elbows still were wanting; these, some say,
An alderman of Cripplegate contrived;
And some ascribe th' invention to a priest,
Burly, and big, and studious of his ease.
But rude at first, and not with easy slope
Receding wide, they press'd against the ribs,
And bruised the side; and, elevated high,
Taught the raised shoulders to invade the ears.
Long time elapsed or e'er our rugged sires
Complain'd, though incommodiously pent in,
And ill at ease behind. The ladies first
'Gan murmur, as became the softer sex.
Ingenious fancy, never better pleased
Than when employ'd t' accommodate the fair,
Heard the sweet moan with pity, and devised
The soft settee; one elbow at each end,
And in the midst an elbow, it received,
United yet divided, twain at once.
So sit two kings of Brentford on one throne;[2]
And so two citizens, who take the air,
Close pack'd, and smiling in a chaise and one.
But relaxation of the languid frame,
By soft recumbency of outstretch'd limbs,
Was bliss reserved for happier days. So slow
The growth of what is excellent; so hard
T' attain perfection in this nether world.
Thus first necessity invented stools,
Convenience next suggested elbow chairs,
And luxury the accomplish'd SOFA last.
  The nurse sleeps sweetly, hired to watch the sick,
Whom snoring she disturbs. As sweetly he
Who quits the coach-box at the midnight hour,
To sleep within the carriage more secure,
His legs depending at the open door.
Sweet sleep enjoys the curate in his desk,
The tedious rector drawling o'er his head;
And sweet the clerk below. But neither sleep
Of lazy nurse who snores the sick man dead,

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Nor his who quits the box at midnight hour
To slumber in the carriage more secure,
Nor sleep enjoy'd by curate in his desk,
Nor yet the dozings of the clerk, are sweet,
Compared with the repose the SOFA yields.[3]
  O may I live exempted (while I live
Guiltless of pamper'd appetite obscene)
From pangs arthritic, that infest the toe
Of libertine excess. The SOFA suits
The gouty limb, 'tis true; but gouty limb,
Though on a SOFA, may I never feel:
For I have loved the rural walk through lanes
Of grassy swarth, close cropp'd by nibbling sheep,
And skirted thick with intertexture firm
Of thorny boughs: have loved the rural walk
O'er hills, through valleys, and by rivers' brink,
E'er since a truant boy I pass'd my bounds,
T' enjoy a ramble on the banks of Thames;
And still remember, nor without regret
Of hours that sorrow since has much endear'd,
How oft, my slice of pocket store consumed,
Still hungering pennyless, and far from home,
I fed on scarlet hips and stony haws,
Or blushing crabs, or berries that emboss
The bramble, black as jet, or sloes austere.
Hard fare! but such as boyish appetite
Disdains not; nor the palate, undepraved
By culinary arts, unsavoury deems.
No SOFA then awaited my return;
Nor SOFA then I needed. Youth repairs
His wasted spirits quickly, by long toil
Incurring short fatigue; and, though our years,
As life declines, speed rapidly away,
And not a year but pilfers as he goes
Some youthful grace, that age would gladly keep;
A tooth or auburn* lock, and by degrees
Their length and colour from the locks they spare;
Th' elastic spring of an unwearied foot,

* The colour may perhaps have been selected, out of compliment to Mrs Unwin, whose hair was bright auburn.

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That mounts the stile with ease, or leaps the fence,
That play of lungs, inhaling and again
Respiring freely the fresh air, that makes
Swift pace or steep ascent no toil to me,
Mine have not pilfer'd yet; nor yet impair'd
My relish of fair prospect: scenes that soothed
Or charm'd me young, no longer young, I find
Still soothing, and of power to charm me still.
And witness, dear companion of my walks,
Whose arm this twentieth winter I perceive
Fast lock'd in mine, with pleasure such as love,
Confirm'd by long experience of thy worth
And well-tried virtues, could alone inspire—
Witness a joy that thou hast doubled long.
Thou know'st my praise of Nature most sincere,
And that my raptures are not conjured up
To serve occasions of poetic pomp,
But genuine, and art partner of them all.
How oft upon yon eminence our pace
Has slacken'd to a pause, and we have borne
The ruffling wind, scarce conscious that it blew,
While admiration, feeding at the eye,
And still unsated, dwelt upon the scene.
Thence with what pleasure have we just discern'd
The distant plough slow moving, and beside
His labouring team, that swerved not from the track,
The sturdy swain diminish'd to a boy!
Here Ouse, slow winding through a level plain
Of spacious meads with cattle sprinkled o'er,
Conducts the eye along his sinuous course
Delighted. There, fast rooted in their bank,
Stand, never overlook'd our favourite elms,
That screen the herdsman's solitary hut;
While far beyond, and overthwart the stream,
That, as with molten glass, inlays the vale,
The sloping land recedes into the clouds;
Displaying on its varied side the grace
Of hedge-row beauties numberless, square tower,
Tall spire, from which the sound of cheerful bells
Just undulates upon the listening ear,
Groves, heaths, and smoking villages remote.[4]

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Scenes must be beautiful, which daily view'd
Please daily, and whose novelty survives
Long knowledge and the scrutiny of years:
Praise justly due to those that I describe.
  Nor rural sights alone, but rural sounds,
Exhilarate the spirit, and restore
The tone of languid Nature. Mighty winds,
That sweep the skirt of some far-spreading wood
Of ancient growth, make music not unlike
The dash of Ocean on his winding shore,
And lull the spirit while they fill the mind;
Unnumber'd branches waving in the blast,
And all their leaves fast fluttering, all at once.
Nor less composure waits upon the roar
Of distant floods, or on the softer voice
Of neighbouring fountain, or of rills that slip
Through the cleft rock, and, chiming as they fall
Upon loose pebbles, lose themselves at length
In matted grass, that with a livelier green
Betrays the secret of their silent course.
Nature inanimate employs sweet sounds,
But animated Nature sweeter still,
To soothe and satisfy the human ear.
Ten thousand warblers cheer the day, and one
The livelong night; nor these alone, whose notes
Nice-finger'd art must emulate in vain,
But cawing rooks, and kites that swim sublime
In still repeated circles, screaming loud,
The jay, the pie, and e'en the boding owl,
That hails the rising moon, have charms for me.
Sounds inharmonious in themselves and harsh,
Yet heard in scenes where peace for ever reigns,
And only there, please highly for their sake.
  Peace to the artist whose ingenious thought
Devised the weather-house, that useful toy!
Fearless of humid air and gathering rains,
Forth steps the man — an emblem of myself!
More delicate his timorous mate retires.
When winter soaks the fields, and female feet,
Too weak to struggle with tenacious clay,
Or ford the rivulets, are best at home,

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The task of new discoveries falls on me.
At such a season, and with such a charge,
Once went I forth; and found, till then unknown,
A cottage, whither oft we since repair:
'Tis perch'd upon the green hill top, but close
Environ'd with a ring of branching elms,
That overhang the hatch, itself unseen
Peeps at the vale below; so thick beset
With foliage of such dark redundant growth,
I call'd the low-roof'd lodge the *Peasant's Nest.*
And, hidden as it is, and far remote
From such unpleasing sounds as haunt the ear
In village or in town, the bay of curs
Incessant, clinking hammers, grinding wheels,
And infants clamorous, whether pleased or pain'd,
Oft have I wish'd the peaceful covert mine.
Here, I have said, at least I should possess
The poet's treasure, silence, and indulge
The dreams of fancy, tranquil and secure.
Vain thought! the dweller in that still retreat
Dearly obtains the refuge it affords.
Its elevated site forbids the wretch
To drink sweet waters of the crystal well;
He dips his bowl into the weedy ditch,
And, heavy laden, brings his beverage home,
Far fetch'd, and little worth; nor seldom waits,
Dependent on the baker's punctual call,
To hear his creaking panniers at the door,
Angry and sad, and his last crust consumed.
So farewell envy of the Peasant's Nest!
If solitude make scant the means of life,
Society for me!—thou seeming sweet,
Be still a pleasing object in my view:
My visit still, but never mine abode.
  Not distant far, a length of colonnade
Invites us: monument of ancient taste,
Now scorn'd, but worthy of a better fate.
Our fathers knew the value of a screen
From sultry suns: and, in their shaded walks
And long protracted bowers, enjoy'd at noon
The gloom and coolness of declining day.

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We bear our shades about us, self-deprived
Of other screen, the thin umbrella spread,
And range an Indian waste without a tree.
Thanks to Benevolus *—he spares me yet
These chestnuts ranged in corresponding lines;
And, though himself so polish'd, still reprieves
The obsolete proxility of shade.
Descending now (but cautious, lest too fast)
A sudden steep, upon a rustic bridge
We pass a gulf, in which the willows dip
Their pendent boughs, stooping as if to drink.
Hence, ankle-deep in moss and flowery thyme,
We mount again, and feel at every step
Our foot half sunk in hillocks green and soft,
Raised by the mole, the miner of the soil.
He, not unlike the great ones of mankind,
Disfigures earth; and, plotting in the dark,
Toils much to earn a monumental pile,
That may record the mischiefs he has done.
The summit gain'd, behold the proud alcove
That crowns it! yet not all its pride secures
The grand retreat from injuries impress'd
By rural carvers, who with knives deface
The panels, leaving an obscure, rude name,
In characters uncouth, and spelt amiss.
So strong the zeal to immortalize himself
Beats in the breast of man, that e'en a few,
Few transient years, won from th' abyss abhorr'd
Of blank oblivion, seem a glorious prize,
And even to a clown. Now roves the eye;
And, posted on this speculative height,
Exults in its command. The sheepfold here
Pours out its fleecy tenants o'er the glebe.
At first, progressive as a stream, they seek
The middle field; but, scatter'd by degrees,
Each to his choice, soon whiten all the land.
There from the sun-burnt hayfield homeward creeps
The loaded wain; while, lighten'd of its charge,

* John Courtnay Throckmorton, Esq. of Weston-Underwood, afterwards Sir John Throckmorton.

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The wain that meets it passes swiftly by;
The boorish driver, leaning o'er his team
Vociferous, and impatient of delay.
Nor less attractive is the woodland scene,
Diversified with trees of every growth,
Alike, yet various. Here the gray smooth trunks
Of ash, or lime, or beech, distinctly shine
Within the twilight of their distant shades;
There, lost behind a rising ground, the wood
Seems sunk, and shorten'd to its topmost boughs.
No tree in all the grove but has its charms,
Though each its hue peculiar; paler some,
And of a wannish gray; the willow such,
And poplar that with silver lines his leaf,
And ash far-stretching his umbrageous arm;
Of deeper green the elm; and deeper still,
Lord of the woods, the long-surviving oak.
Some glossy-leaved, and shining in the sun,
The maple, and the beech of oily nuts
Prolific, and the lime at dewy eve
Diffusing odours; nor unnoted pass
The sycamore, capricious in attire,
Now green, now tawny, and ere autumn yet
Have changed the woods, in scarlet honours bright.
O'er these but far beyond (a spacious map
Of hill and valley interposed between,)
The Ouse, dividing the well-water'd land,
Now glitters in the sun, and now retires,
As bashful, yet impatient to be seen.
  Hence the declivity is sharp and short,
And such the re-ascent; between them weeps
A little Naïad her impoverish'd urn
All summer long, which winter fills again.
The folded gates would bar my progress now,
But that the lord of this enclosed demesne,
Communicative of the good he owns,
Admits me to a share; the guiltless eye
Commits no wrong, nor wastes what it enjoys.
Refreshing change! where now the blazing sun?
By short transition we have lost his glare,

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And stepp'd at once into a cooler clime.
Ye fallen avenues! once more I mourn
Your fate unmerited, once more rejoice
That yet a remnant of your race survives.
How airy and how light the graceful arch,
Yet awful as the consecrated roof
Re-echoing pious anthems! while beneath
The checker'd earth seems restless as a flood
Brush'd by the wind. So sportive is the light
Shot through the boughs, it dances as they dance,
Shadow and sunshine intermingling quick,
And darkening and enlightening, as the leaves
Play wanton, every moment, every spot.
And now, with nerves new braced, and spirits cheer'd,
We tread the wilderness, whose well-roll'd walks,
With curvature of slow and easy sweep—
Deception innocent—give ample space
To narrow bounds. The grove receives us next;
Between the upright shafts of whose tall elms
We may discern the thresher at his task.
Thump after thump resounds the constant flail,
That seems to swing uncertain, and yet falls
Full on the destined ear. Wide flies the chaff,
The rustling straw sends up a frequent mist
Of atoms, sparkling in the noonday beam.
Come hither, ye that press your beds of down,
And sleep not; see him sweating o'er his bread
Before he eats it. 'Tis the primal curse,
But soften'd into mercy; made the pledge
Of cheerful days, and nights without a groan.
By ceaseless action all that is subsists.
Constant rotation of the unwearied wheel,
That Nature rides upon, maintains her health,
Her beauty, her fertility. She dreads
An instant's pause, and lives but while she moves.
Its own revolvency upholds the world.
Winds from all quarters agitate the air,
And fit the limpid element for use,
Else noxious; oceans, rivers, lakes, and streams,
All feel the freshening impulse, and are cleansed

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By restless undulation; e'en the oak
Thrives by the rude concussion of the storm:
He seems, indeed, indignant, and to feel
Th' impression of the blast with proud disdain,
Frowning, as if in his unconscious arm
He held the thunder: but the monarch owes
His firm stability to what he scorns,
More fix'd below, the more disturb'd above.
The law, by which all creatures else are bound
Binds man, the lord of all. Himself derives
No mean advantage from a kindred cause,
From strenuous toil his hours of sweetest ease.
The sedentary stretch their lazy length
When custom bids, but no refreshment find,
For none they need: the languid eye, the cheek
Deserted of its bloom, the flaccid, shrunk,
And wither'd muscle, and the vapid soul,
Reproach their owner with that love of rest,
To which he forfeits e'en the rest he loves.
Not such th' alert and active. Measure life
By its true worth, the comforts it affords,
And theirs alone seems worthy of the name.
Good health, and, its associate in the most,
Good temper; spirits prompt to undertake,
And not soon spent, though in an arduous task;
The powers of fancy and strong thought are theirs;
Even age itself seems privileged in them,
With clear exemption from its own defects.
A sparkling eye beneath a wrinkled front
The veteran shews, and gracing a gray beard
With youthful smiles, descends toward the grave
Sprightly and old almost without decay.
  Like a coy maiden, ease, when courted most,
Farthest retires—an idol, at whose shrine
Who oftenest sacrifice are favour'd least.
The love of Nature, and the scenes she draws,
Is Nature's dictate. Strange! there should be found
Who, self-imprison'd in their proud saloons,
Renounce the odours of the open field
For the unscented fictions of the loom;
Who, satisfied with only pencill'd scenes,

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Prefer to the performance of a God
The inferior wonders of an artist's hand!
Lovely, indeed, the mimic works of art;
But Nature's works far lovelier. I admire—
None more admires—the painter's magic skill,
Who shews me that which I shall never see,
Conveys a distant country into mine,
And throws Italian light on English walls:
But imitative strokes can do no more
Than please the eye—sweet Nature's every sense.
The air salubrious of her lofty hills,
The cheering fragrance of her dewy vales,
And music of her woods—no works of man
May rival these, these all bespeak a power
Peculiar, and exclusively her own.
Beneath the open sky she spreads the feast;
'Tis free to all—'tis every day renew'd;
Who scorns it starves deservedly at home.
He does not scorn it, who, imprison'd long
In some unwholesome dungeon, and a prey
To sallow sickness, which the vapours, dank
And clammy, of his dark abode have bred,
Escapes at last to liberty and light:
His cheek recovers soon its healthful hue;
His eye relumines its extinguish'd fires;
He walks, he leaps, he runs—is wing'd with joy,
And riots in the sweets of every breeze.
He does not scorn it, who has long endured
A fever's agonies, and fed on drugs.
Nor yet the mariner, his blood inflamed
With acrid salts: his very heart athirst,
To gaze at Nature in her green array,
Upon the ship's tall side he stands, possess'd
With visions prompted by intense desire:
Fair fields appear below, such as he left
Far distant, such as he would die to find—
He seeks them headlong and is seen no more.
The spleen is seldom felt where Flora reigns;
The low'ring eye, the petulance, the frown,
And sullen sadness, that o'ershade, distort,
And mar the face of beauty, when no cause

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For such immeasurable woe appears,
These Flora banishes, and gives the fair
Sweet smiles, and bloom less transient than her own.
It is the constant revolution, stale
And tasteless, of the same repeated joys,
That palls and satiates, and makes languid life
A pedlar's pack, that bows the bearer down.
Health suffers, and the spirits ebb; the heart
Recoils from its own choice — at the full feast
Is famish'd — finds no music in the song,
No smartness in the jest, and wonders why.
Yet thousands still desire to journey on,
Though halt, and weary of the path they tread.
The paralytic, who can hold her cards,
But cannot play them, borrows a friend's hand
To deal and shuffle, to divide and sort
Her mingled suits and sequences, and sits,
Spectatress both and spectacle, a sad
And silent cipher, while her proxy plays.
Others are dragg'd into the crowded room
Between supporters; and once seated, sit,
Through downright inability to rise,
Till the stout bearers lift the corpse again.
These speak a loud memento. Yet even these
Themselves love life, and cling to it, as he
That overhangs a torrent to a twig.
They love it, and yet loathe it; fear to die,
Yet scorn the purposes for which they live.
Then wherefore not renounce them? No — the dread,
The slavish dread of solitude, that breeds
Reflection and remorse, the fear of shame,
And their inveterate habits, all forbid.
  Whom call we gay? That honour has been long
The boast of mere pretenders to the name.
The innocent are gay — the lark is gay,
That dries his feathers, saturate with dew,
Beneath the rosy cloud, while yet the beams
Of dayspring overshoot his humble nest.
The peasant, too, a witness of his song,
Himself a songster, is as gay as he.
But save me from the gaiety of those

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Whose headachs nail them to a noonday bed;
And save me too from theirs, whose haggard eyes
Flash desperation, and betray their pangs
For property stripp'd off by cruel chance;
From gaiety, that fills the bones with pain,
The mouth with blasphemy, the heart with wo.
The earth was made so various, that the mind
Of desultory man, studious of change,
And pleased with novelty, might be indulged.
Prospects, however lovely, may be seen
Till half their beauties fade; the weary sight,
Too well acquainted with their smiles, slides off
Fastidious, seeking less familiar scenes.
Then snug enclosures in the shelter'd vale,
Where frequent hedges intercept the eye,
Delight us; happy to renounce a while,
Not senseless of its charms, what still we love,
That such short absence may endear it more.
Then forests, or the savage rock, may please,
That hides the sea-mew in his hollow clefts
Above the reach of man: his hoary head,
Conspicuous many a league, the mariner
Bound homeward, and in hope already there,
Greets with three cheers exulting. At his waist
A girdle of half wither'd shrubs he shews,
And at his feet the baffled billows die.
The common, overgrown with fern, and rough
With prickly gorse, that, shapeless and deform'd,
And dangerous to the touch, has yet its bloom,
And decks itself with ornaments of gold,
Yields no unpleasing ramble; there the turf
Smells fresh, and, rich in odoriferous herbs
And fungous fruits of earth, regales the sense
With luxury of unexpected sweets.
There often wanders one, whom better days
Saw better clad, in cloak of satin trimm'd
With lace, and hat with splendid riband bound.
A serving maid was she, and fell in love
With one who left her, went to sea, and died.
Her fancy follow'd him through foaming waves
To distant shores; and she would sit and weep

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At what a sailor suffers; fancy, too,
Delusive most where warmest wishes are,
Would oft anticipate his glad return,
And dream of transports she was not to know.
She heard the doleful tidings of his death—
And never smiled again. And now she roams
The dreary waste; there spends the livelong day;
And there, unless when charity forbids,
The livelong night. A tatter'd apron hides,
Worn as a cloak, and hardly hides, a gown
More tatter'd still; and both but ill conceal
A bosom heaved with never ceasing sighs.
She begs an idle pin of all she meets,
And hoards them in her sleeve; but needful food,
Though press'd with hunger oft, or comelier clothes,
Though pinch'd with cold, asks never—Kate is crazed![5]

I see a column of slow-rising smoke
O'ertop the lofty wood that skirts the wild.
A vagabond and useless tribe there eat
Their miserable meal. A kettle, slung
Between two poles upon a stick transverse,
Receives the morsel,—flesh obscene of dog,
Or vermin, or at best of cock purloin'd
From his accustom'd perch. Hard faring race!
They pick their fuel out of every hedge,
Which, kindled with dry leaves, just saves unquench'd
The spark of life. The sportive wind blows wide
Their fluttering rags, and shews a tawny skin,
The vellum of the pedigree they claim.
Great skill have they in palmistry, and more
To conjure clean away the gold they touch,
Conveying worthless dross into its place;
Loud when they beg, dumb only when they steal.
Strange! that a creature rational, and cast
In human mould, should brutalize by choice
His nature; and, though capable of arts,
By which the world might profit, and himself,
Self-banish'd from society, prefer
Such squalid sloth to honourable toil!
Yet even these, though feigning sickness oft,
They swathe the forehead, drag the limping limb,

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And vex their flesh with artificial sores,
Can change their whine into a mirthful note,
When safe occasion offers; and with dance,
And music of the bladder and the bag,
Beguile their woes, and make the woods resound.
Such health and gaiety of heart enjoy
The houseless rovers of the sylvan world;
And, breathing wholesome air, and wandering much,
Need other physic none to heal th' effects
Of loathsome diet, penury, and cold.
  Blest he, though undistinguish'd from the crowd
By wealth or dignity, who dwells secure,
Where man, by nature fierce, has laid aside
His fierceness, having learnt, though slow to learn,
The manners and the arts of civil life.
His wants indeed are many; but supply
Is obvious, placed within the easy reach
Of temperate wishes and industrious hands.
Here virtue thrives as in her proper soil;
Not rude and surly, and beset with thorns,
And terrible to sight, as when she springs
(If e'er she springs spontaneous) in remote
And barbarous climes, where violence prevails,
And strength is lord of all; but gentle, kind,
By culture tamed, by liberty refresh'd,
And all her fruits by radiant truth matured.
War and the chase engross the savage whole;
War follow'd for revenge, or to supplant
The envied tenants of some happier spot,
The chase for sustenance, precarious trust!
His hard condition with severe constraint
Binds all his faculties, forbids all growth
Of wisdom, proves a school, in which he learns
Sly circumvention, unrelenting hate,
Mean self-attachment, and scarce aught beside.
Thus fare the shivering natives of the north,
And thus the rangers of the western world,
Where it advances far into the deep,
Towards the antarctic. Even the favour'd isles
So lately found, although the constant sun
Cheer all their seasons with a grateful smile,

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Can boast but little virtue; and inert
Through plenty, lose in morals what they gain
In manners—victims of luxurious ease.
These therefore I can pity, placed remote
From all that science traces, art invents,
Or inspiration teaches; and enclosed
In boundless oceans, never to be pass'd
By navigators uninform'd as they,
Or plough'd perhaps by British bark again:
But far beyond the rest, and with most cause,
Thee, gentle savage![6] whom no love of thee
Or thine, but curiosity, perhaps,
Or else vain glory, prompted us to draw
Forth from thy native bowers, to shew thee here
With what superior skill we can abuse
The gifts of Providence, and squander life.
The dream is past; and thou hast found again
Thy cocoas and bananas, palms and yams,
And homestall thatch'd with leaves. But hast thou found
Their former charms? And, having seen our state,
Our palaces, our ladies, and our pomp
Of equipage, our gardens, and our sports,
And heard our music; are thy simple friends,
Thy simple fare, and all thy plain delights,
As dear to thee as once? And have thy joys
Lost nothing by comparison with ours?
Rude as thou art (for we return'd thee rude
And ignorant, except of outward show)
I cannot think thee yet so dull of heart
And spiritless, as never to regret
Sweets tasted here, and left as soon as known.
Methinks I see thee straying on the beach,
And asking of the surge, that bathes thy foot,
If ever it has wash'd our distant shore.
I see thee weep, and thine are honest tears,
A patriot's for his country: thou art sad
At thought of her forlorn and abject state,
From which no power of thine can raise her up.
Thus fancy paints thee, and, though apt to err,
Perhaps errs little, when she paints thee thus.
She tells me too, that duly every morn

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Thou climb'st the mountain top, with eager eye
Exploring far and wide the watery waste
For sight of ship from England. Every speck
Seen in the dim horizon turns thee pale
With conflict of contending hopes and fears.
But comes at last the dull and dusky eve,
And sends thee to thy cabin, well prepared
To dream all night of what the day denied.
Alas! expect it not. We found no bait
To tempt us in thy country. Doing good,
Disinterested good, is not our trade.
We travel far, 'tis true, but not for nought;
And must be bribed to compass earth again
By other hopes and richer fruits than yours.
  But though true worth and virtue in the mild
And genial soil of cultivated life
Thrive most, and may perhaps thrive only there,
Yet not in cities oft—in proud, and gay,
And gain-devoted cities. Thither flow,
As to a common and most noisome sewer,
The dregs and feculence of every land.
In cities foul example on most minds
Begets its likeness. Rank abundance breeds,
In gross and pamper'd cities, sloth, and lust,
And wantonness, and gluttonous excess.
In cities vice is hidden with most ease,
Or seen with least reproach; and virtue, taught
By frequent lapse, can hope no triumph there
Beyond th' achievement of successful flight.
I do confess them nurseries of the arts,
In which they flourish most; where, in the beams
Of warm encouragement, and in the eye
Of public note, they reach their perfect size.
Such London is, by taste and wealth proclaim'd
The fairest capital of all the world,
By riot and incontinence the worst.
There, touch'd by Reynolds, a dull blank becomes
A lucid mirror, in which Nature sees
All her reflected features. Bacon there
Gives more than female beauty to a stone,
And Chatham's eloquence to marble lips.

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Nor does the chisel occupy alone
The powers of sculpture, but the style as much; *
Each province of her art her equal care.
With nice incision of her guided steel
She ploughs a brazen field, and clothes a soil
So steril with what charms soe'er she will,
The richest scenery and the loveliest forms.
Where finds philosophy her eagle eye,
With which she gazes at yon burning disk
Undazzled, and detects and counts his spots?
In London. Where her implements exact,
With which she calculates, computes, and scans,
All distance, motion, magnitude, and now
Measures an atom, and now girds a world?
In London. Where has commerce such a mart,
So rich, so throng'd, so drain'd, and so supplied,
As London—opulent, enlarged, and still
Increasing, London? Babylon of old
Not more the glory of the earth than she,
A more accomplish'd world's chief glory now.
She has her praise. Now mark a spot or two,
That so much beauty would do well to purge;
And shew this queen of cities, that so fair
May yet be foul; so witty, yet not wise.
It is not seemly, nor of good report,
That she is slack in discipline; more prompt
T' avenge than to prevent the breach of law:
That she is rigid in denouncing death
On petty robbers, and indulges life
And liberty, and ofttimes honour too,
To peculators of the public gold;
That thieves at home must hang; but he that puts
Into his overgorged and bloated purse
The wealth of Indian provinces, escapes.
Nor is it well, nor can it come to good,
That, through profane and infidel contempt
Of Holy Writ, she has presumed t' annul
And abrogate, as roundly as she may,
The total ordinance and will of God;

* Style is here used for the engraving tool; there is some affectation in the subsequent description of the art.

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Advancing fashion to the post of truth,
And centering all authority in modes
And customs of her own, till Sabbath rites
Have dwindled into unrespected forms,
And knees and hassocks are well nigh divorced.
God made the country, and man made the town.
What wonder then that health and virtue, gifts
That can alone make sweet the bitter draught
That life holds out to all, should most abound
And least be threaten'd in the fields and groves?
Possess ye therefore — ye who, borne about
In chariots and sedans, know no fatigue
But that of idleness, and taste no scenes
But such as art contrives — possess ye still
Your element; there only ye can shine;
There only minds like yours can do no harm.
Our groves were planted to console at noon
The pensive wanderer in their shades. At eve
The moonbeam, sliding softly in between
The sleeping leaves, is all the light they wish,
Birds warbling all the music. We can spare
The splendour of your lamps; they but eclipse
Our softer satellite. Your songs confound
Our more harmonious notes: the thrush departs
Scared, and the offended nightingale is mute.
There is a public mischief in your mirth;
It plagues your country. Folly such as yours,
Graced with a sword, and worthier of a fan,
Has made — what enemies could ne'er have done —
Our arch of empire, steadfast but for you,
A mutilated structure, soon to fall.

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THE TASK.

BOOK II.

THE TIME-PIECE.

ARGUMENT OF THE SECOND BOOK.

Reflections suggested by the conclusion of the former book. — Peace among the nations recommended, on the ground of their common fellowship in sorrow. — Prodigies enumerated. — Sicilian earthquakes. — Man rendered obnoxious to these calamities by sin. — God the agent in them. — The philosophy that stops at secondary causes reproved. — Our own late miscarriages accounted for. — Satirical notice taken of our trips to Fontainbleau. — But the pulpit, not satire, the proper engine of reformation. — The reverend advertiser of engraved sermons.—Petite-maitre parson.—The good preacher. — Picture of a theatrical clerical coxcomb. — Story-tellers and jesters in the pulpit reproved. — Apostrophe to popular applause. — Retailers of ancient philosophy expostulated with. — Sum of the whole matter. — Effects of sacerdotal mismanagement on the laity. — Their folly and extravagance. — The mischiefs of profusion. — Profusion itself, with all its consequent evils, ascribed, as to its principal cause, to the want of discipline in the universities.

O FOR a lodge in some vast wilderness,
Some boundless contiguity of shade,
Where rumour of oppression and deceit,
Of unsuccessful or successful war,
Might never reach me more. My ear is pain'd,
My soul is sick with every day's report
Of wrong and outrage with which earth is fill'd.
There is no flesh in man's obdurate heart,
It does not feel for man; the natural bond
Of brotherhood is sever'd as the flax
That falls asunder at the touch of fire.
He finds his fellow guilty of a skin
Not colour'd like his own; and having power
T' enforce the wrong, for such a worthy cause
Dooms and devotes him as his lawful prey.

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Lands intersected by a narrow frith
Abhor each other: mountains interposed
Make enemies of nations, who had else
Like kindred drops been mingled into one.
Thus man devotes his brother, and destroys;
And, worse than all, and most to be deplored
As human nature's broadest, foulest blot,
Chains him, and tasks him, and exacts his sweat
With stripes, that mercy with a bleeding heart
Weeps, when she sees inflicted on a beast.
Then what is man? And what man, seeing this,
And having human feelings, does not blush,
And hang his head, to think himself a man?
I would not have a slave to till my ground,
To carry me, to fan me while I sleep,
And tremble when I wake, for all the wealth
That sinews bought and sold have ever earn'd.
No: dear as freedom is, and in my heart's
Just estimation prized above all price,
I had much rather be myself the slave,
And wear the bonds, than fasten them on him.
We have no slaves at home—then why abroad?
And they themselves once ferried o'er the wave
That parts us, are emancipate and loosed.
Slaves cannot breathe in England; if their lungs
Receive our air, that moment they are free;
They touch our country, and their shackles fall.
That 's noble, and bespeaks a nation proud
And jealous of the blessing. Spread it then,
And let it circulate through every vein
Of all your empire, that where Britain's power
Is felt, mankind may feel her mercy too.
  Sure there is need of social intercourse,
Benevolence, and peace, and mutual aid,
Between the nations in a world that seems
To toll the death-bell of its own decease,
And by the voice of all its elements
To preach the general doom. When were the winds
Let slip with such a warrant to destroy?
When did the waves so haughtily o'erleap
Their ancient barriers, deluging the dry?

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Fires from beneath, and meteors from above,
Portentous, unexampled, unexplain'd,
Have kindled beacons in the skies, and th' old
And crazy earth has had her shaking fits
More frequent, and foregone her usual rest.
Is it a time to wrangle, when the props
And pillars of our planet seem to fail,
And Nature with a dim and sickly eye
To wait the close of all? But, grant her end
More distant, and that prophecy demands
A longer respite, unaccomplish'd yet;
Still they are frowning signals, and bespeak
Displeasure in His breast, who smites the earth
Or heals it, makes it languish or rejoice.
And 'tis but seemly, that, where all deserve
And stand exposed by common peccancy
To what no few have felt, there should be peace,
And brethren in calamity should love.[1]
  Alas for Sicily! rude fragments now
Lie scatter'd where the shapely column stood.
Her palaces are dust. In all her streets
The voice of singing and the sprightly chord
Are silent. Revelry, and dance, and show,
Suffer a syncope and solemn pause,
While God performs upon the trembling stage
Of his own works his dreadful part alone.
How does the earth receive Him? — with what signs
Of gratulation and delight her King?
Pours she not all her choicest fruits abroad,
Her sweetest flowers, her aromatic gums,
Disclosing paradise where'er He treads?
She quakes at His approach. Her hollow womb,
Conceiving thunders, through a thousand deeps
And fiery caverns, roars beneath His foot.
The hills move lightly, and the mountains smoke,
For He has touch'd them. From th' extremest point
Of elevation down into the abyss
His wrath is busy, and His frown is felt.
The rocks fall headlong, and the valleys rise,
The rivers die into offensive pools,
And, charged with putrid verdure, breathe a gross

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And mortal nuisance into all the air.
What solid was, by transformation strange,
Grows fluid, and the fix'd and rooted earth,
Tormented into billows, heaves and swells,
Or, with vortiginous and hideous whirl,
Sucks down its prey insatiable. Immense
The tumult and the overthrow, the pangs
And agonies of human and of brute
Multitudes, fugitive on every side,
And fugitive in vain. The sylvan scene
Migrates uplifted, and, with all its soil
Alighting in far distant fields, finds out
A new possessor, and survives the change
Ocean has caught the frenzy, and, upwrought
To an enormous and o'erbearing height,
Not by a mighty wind, but by that voice
Which winds and waves obey, invades the shore
Resistless. Never such a sudden flood,
Upridged so high, and sent on such a charge,
Possess'd an inland scene. Where now the throng
That press'd the beach, and, hasty to depart,
Look'd to the sea for safety? They are gone,
Gone with the refluent wave into the deep—
A prince with half his people. Ancient towers,
And roofs embattled high, the gloomy scenes,
Where beauty oft and letter'd worth consume
Life in the unproductive shades of death,
Fall prone: the pale inhabitants come forth,
And, happy in their unforeseen release
From all the rigours of restraint, enjoy
The terrors of the day that sets them free.
Who then that has thee would not hold thee fast,
Freedom! whom they that lose thee so regret,
That e'en a judgment, making way for thee,
Seems in their eyes a mercy for thy sake.

Such evil sin hath wrought; and such a flame
Kindled in heaven that it burns down to earth,
And in the furious inquest that it makes
On God's behalf, lays waste his fairest works.
The very elements, though each be meant
The minister of man, to serve his wants,

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Conspire against him. With his breath he draws
A plague into his blood; and cannot use
Life's necessary means, but he must die.
Storms rise t' o'erwhelm him; or, if stormy winds
Rise not, the waters of the deep shall rise,
And, needing none assistance of the storm,
Shall roll themselves ashore, and reach him there.
The earth shall shake him out of all his holds,
Or make his house his grave: nor so content,
Shall counterfeit the motions of the flood,
And drown him in her dry and dusty gulfs.
What then — were they wicked above all,
And we the righteous, whose fast-anchor'd isle
Moved not, while theirs was rock'd, like a light skiff,
The sport of every wave? No: none are clear,
And none than we more guilty. But where all
Stand chargeable with guilt, and to the shafts
Of wrath obnoxious, God may choose his mark;
May punish, if he please, the less, to warn
The more malignant. If he spared not them,
Tremble and be amazed at thine escape,
Far guiltier England, lest he spare not thee!
  Happy the man, who sees a God employ'd
In all the good and ill that chequer life!
Resolving all events, with their effects
And manifold results, into the will
And arbitration wise of the Supreme.
Did not His eye rule all things, and intend
The least of our concerns, (since from the least
The greatest oft originate,) could chance
Find place in his dominion, or dispose
One lawless particle to thwart His plan,
Then God might be surprised, and unforeseen
Contingence might alarm him, and disturb
The smooth and equal course of His affairs.
This truth Philosophy, though eagle-eyed
In nature's tendencies, oft overlooks;
And, having found his instrument, forgets,
Or disregards, or, more presumptuous still,
Denies the power that wields it. God proclaims
His hot displeasure against foolish men

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That live an atheist life; involves the heaven
In tempests; quits his grasp upon the winds,
And gives them all their fury; bids a plague
Kindle a fiery boil upon the skin,
And putrefy the breath of blooming health.
He calls for Famine, and the meagre fiend
Blows mildew from between his shrivell'd lips,
And taints the golden ear. He springs his mines,
And desolates a nation at a blast.
Forth steps the spruce philosopher, and tells
Of homogeneal and discordant springs
And principles; of causes, how they work
By necessary laws their sure effects;
Of action and reaction: he has found
The source of the disease that nature feels,
And bids the world take heart and banish fear.
Thou fool! will thy discovery of the cause
Suspend the effect, or heal it? Has not God
Still wrought by means since first he made the world?
And did he not of old employ his means
To drown it? What is his creation less
Than a capacious reservoir of means
Form'd for his use, and ready at his will?
Go, dress thine eyes with eye-salve, ask of Him,
Or ask of whomsoever he has taught,
And learn, though late, the genuine cause of all.

England, with all thy faults, I love thee still—
My country! and, while yet a nook is left,
Where English minds and manners may be found,
Shall be constrain'd to love thee. Though thy clime
Be fickle, and thy year, most part, deform'd
With dripping rains, or wither'd by a frost,
I would not yet exchange thy sullen skies,
And fields without a flower, for warmer France
With all her vines; nor for Ausonia's groves
Of golden fruitage, and her myrtle bowers.
To shake thy senate, and from heights sublime
Of patriot eloquence to flash down fire
Upon thy foes, was never meant my task:
But I can feel thy fortunes, and partake
Thy joys and sorrows, with as true a heart

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As any thunderer there. And I can feel
Thy follies too; and with a just disdain
Frown at effeminates, whose very looks
Reflect dishonour on the land I love.
How, in the name of soldiership and sense,
Should England prosper, when such things, as smooth
And tender as a girl, all essenced o'er
With odours, and as profligate as sweet—
Who sell their laurel for a myrtle wreath,
And love when they should fight—when such as these
Presume to lay their hands upon the ark
Of her magnificent and awful cause?
Time was when it was praise and boast enough
In every clime, and travel where we might,
That we were born her children. Praise enough
To fill the ambition of a private man,
That Chatham's language was his mother tongue,
And Wolfe's great name compatriot with his own.
Farewell those honours, and farewell with them
The hope of such hereafter! They have fallen
Each in his field of glory; one in arms,
And one in council,—Wolfe upon the lap
Of smiling Victory that moment won,
And Chatham heart-sick of his country's shame!
They made us many soldiers. Chatham, still
Consulting England's happiness at home,
Secured it by an unforgiving frown,
If any wrong'd her. Wolfe, where'er he fought,
Put so much of his heart into his act,
That his example had a magnet's force,
And all were swift to follow whom all loved.
Those suns are set. Oh, rise some other such!
Or all that we have left is empty talk
Of old achievements, and despair of new.

Now hoist the sail, and let the streamers float
Upon the wanton breezes. Strew the deck
With lavender, and sprinkle liquid sweets,
That no rude savour maritime invade
The nose of nice nobility! Breathe soft
Ye clarionets, and softer still ye flutes,
That winds and waters, lull'd by magic sounds,

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May bear us smoothly to the Gallic shore!
True, we have lost an empire*—let it pass.
True; we may thank the perfidy of France,
That pick'd the jewel out of England's crown,
With all the cunning of an envious shrew.
And let that pass—'twas but a trick of state!
A brave man knows no malice, but at once
Forgets in peace the injuries of war,
And gives his direst foe a friend's embrace.
And, shamed as we have been, to the very beard
Braved and defied, and in our own sea proved
Too weak for those decisive blows that once
Ensured us mastery there, we yet retain
Some small pre-eminence; we justly boast
At least superior jockeyship, and claim
The honours of the turf as all our own!
Go then, well worthy of the praise ye seek,
And shew the shame ye might conceal at home
In foreign eyes!—be grooms and win the plate,
Where once your nobler fathers won a crown!—
'Tis generous to communicate your skill
To those that need it. Folly is soon learn'd:
And under such preceptors who can fail!

There is a pleasure in poetic pains,
Which only poets know. The shifts and turns,
The expedients and inventions multiform,
To which the mind resorts, in chase of terms
Though apt, yet coy, and difficult to win—
To arrest the fleeting images that fill
The mirror of the mind, and hold them fast,
And force them sit, till he has pencil'd off
A faithful likeness of the forms he views;
Then to dispose his copies with such art,
That each may find its most propitious light,
And shine by situation, hardly less
Than by the labour and the skill it cost,
Are occupations of the poet's mind
So pleasing, and that steal away the thought
With such address from themes of sad import,

* The American colonies.

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That, lost in his own musings, happy man!
He feels the anxieties of life, denied
Their wonted entertainment, all retire.
Such joys has he that sings. But, ah! not such,
Or seldom such, the hearers of his song.
Fastidious, or else listless, or perhaps
Aware of nothing arduous in a task
They never undertook, they little note
His dangers or escapes, and haply find
Their least amusement where he found the most.
But is amusement all? Studious of song,
And yet ambitious not to sing in vain,
I would not trifle merely, though the world
Be loudest in their praise who do no more.
Yet what can satire, whether grave or gay?
It may correct a foible, may chastise
The freaks of fashion, regulate the dress,
Retrench a sword-blade, or displace a patch;
But where are its sublimer trophies found?
What vice has it subdued? whose heart reclaim'd
By rigour, or whom laugh'd into reform?
Alas! Leviathan is not so tamed:
Laugh'd at, he laughs again; and stricken hard,
Turns to the stroke his adamantine scales,
That fear no discipline of human hands.
The pulpit, therefore, (and I name it fill'd
With solemn awe, that bids me well beware
With what intent I touch that holy thing,)—
The pulpit (when the satirist has at last,
Strutting and vapouring in an empty school,
Spent all his force, and made no proselyte)—
I say the pulpit (in the sober use
Of its legitimate, peculiar powers)
Must stand acknowledged, while the world shall stand,
The most important and effectual guard,
Support, and ornament of virtue's cause.
There stands the messenger of truth: there stands
The legate of the skies! His theme divine,
His office sacred, his credentials clear.
By him the violated law speaks out
Its thunders; and by him, in strains as sweet

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As angels use, the Gospel whispers peace.
He stablishes the strong, restores the weak,
Reclaims the wanderer, binds the broken heart,
And, arm'd himself in panoply complete
Of heavenly temper, furnishes with arms
Bright as his own, and trains, by every rule
Of holy discipline, to glorious war,
The sacramental host of God's elect!
Are all such teachers? would to Heaven all were!
But, hark—the doctor's voice!—fast wedged between
Two empirics he stands, and with swoln cheeks
Inspires the news, his trumpet. Keener far
Than all invective is his bold harangue,
While through that public organ of report
He hails the clergy; and, defying shame,
Announces to the world his own and theirs.
He teaches those to read whom schools dismiss'd,
And colleges, untaught; sells accent, tone,
And emphasis in score, and gives to prayer
The *adagio* and *andante* it demands.
He grinds divinity of other days
Down into modern use, transforms old print
To zigzag manuscript, and cheats the eyes
Of gallery critics by a thousand arts.
Are there who purchase of the doctor's ware?
Oh, name it not in Gath! it cannot be
That grave and learned clerks should need such aid.
He doubtless is in sport, and does but droll,
Assuming thus a rank unknown before—
Grand caterer and dry-nurse of the church!
  I venerate the man whose heart is warm,
Whose hands are pure, whose doctrine and whose life,
Coincident, exhibit lucid proof
That he is honest in the sacred cause.
To such I render more than mere respect,
Whose actions say, that they respect themselves.
But loose in morals, and in manners vain,
In conversation frivolous, in dress
Extreme, at once rapacious and profuse;
Frequent in park with lady at his side,
Ambling and prattling scandal as he goes;

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But rare at home, and never at his books,
Or with his pen, save when he scrawls a card;
Constant at routs, familiar with a round
Of ladyships, a stranger to the poor;
Ambitious of preferment for its gold,
And well prepared, by ignorance and sloth,
By infidelity and love of world,
To make God's work a sinecure; a slave
To his own pleasures and his patron's pride:
From such apostles, O ye mitred heads,
Preserve the church! and lay not careless hands
On skulls that cannot teach, and will not learn.
  Would I describe a preacher, such as Paul,
Were he on earth, would hear, approve, and own,
Paul should himself direct me. I would trace
His master-strokes, and draw from his design.
I would express him simple, grave, sincere;
In doctrine uncorrupt; in language plain,
And plain in manner; decent, solemn, chaste,
And natural in gesture; much impress'd
Himself, as conscious of his awful charge,
And anxious mainly that the flock he feeds
May feel it too; affectionate in look,
And tender in address, as well becomes
A messenger of grace to guilty men.
Behold the picture! Is it like?—Like whom?
The things that mount the rostrum with a skip,
And then skip down again; pronounce a text;
Cry—hem; and reading what they never wrote,
Just fifteen minutes, huddle up their work,
And with a well-bred whisper close the scene!
  In man or woman, but far most in man,
And most of all in man that ministers
And serves the altar, in my soul I loathe
All affectation. 'Tis my perfect scorn,
Object of my implacable disgust.
What! will a man play tricks, will he indulge
A silly fond conceit of his fair form
And just proportion, fashionable mien
And pretty face, in presence of his God?
Or will he seek to dazzle me with tropes,

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As with the diamond on his lily hand,
And play his brilliant parts before my eyes,
When I am hungry for the bread of life?
He mocks his Maker, prostitutes and shames
His noble office, and, instead of truth,
Displaying his own beauty, starves his flock.
Therefore avaunt all attitude, and stare,
And start theatric, practised at the glass.
I seek divine simplicity in him
Who handles things divine; and all besides,
Though learn'd with labour, and though much admired,
By curious eyes and judgments ill inform'd,
To me is odious as the nasal twang
Heard at conventicle, where worthy men,
Misled by custom, strain celestial themes
Through the press'd nostril, spectacle-bestrid.
Some decent in demeanour while they preach,
That task perform'd, relapse into themselves,
And having spoken wisely, at the close
Grow wanton, and give proof to every eye,
Whoe'er was edified, themselves were not.
Forth comes the pocket mirror. First we stroke
An eyebrow; next compose a straggling lock;
Then, with an air most gracefully perform'd,
Fall back into our seat, extend an arm,
And lay it at its ease with gentle care,
With handkerchief in hand depending low.
The better hand, more busy, gives the nose
Its bergamot, or aids the indebted eye
With opera glass, to watch the moving scene,
And recognize the slow-retiring fair.
Now this is fulsome, and offends me more
Than in a churchman slovenly neglect
And rustic coarseness would. A heavenly mind
May be indifferent to her house of clay,
And slight the hovel as beneath her care;
But how a body so fantastic, trim,
And quaint, in its deportment and attire,
Can lodge a heavenly mind — demands a doubt.
He that negotiates between God and man,
As God's ambassador, the grand concerns

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Of judgment and of mercy, should beware
Of lightness in his speech. 'Tis pitiful
To court a grin, when you should woo a soul;
To break a jest, when pity would inspire
Pathetic exhortation; and to address
The skittish fancy with facetious tales,
When sent with God's commission to the heart.
So did not Paul. Direct me to a quip
Or merry turn in all he ever wrote,
And I consent you take it for your text,
Your only one, till sides and benches fall.
No: he was serious in a serious cause,
And understood too well the weighty terms
That he had ta'en in charge. He would not stoop
To conquer those by jocular exploits,
Whom truth and soberness assail'd in vain.

O popular applause! what heart of man
Is proof against thy sweet seducing charms?
The wisest and the best feel urgent need
Of all their caution in thy gentlest gales;
But, swell'd into a gust — who then, alas!
With all his canvass set, and inexpert,
And therefore heedless, can withstand thy power?
Praise from the rivell'd lips of toothless, bald
Decrepitude, and in the looks of lean
And craving poverty, and in the bow
Respectful of the smutch'd artificer,
Is oft too welcome, and may much disturb
The bias of the purpose. How much more,
Pour'd forth by beauty splendid and polite,
In language soft as adoration breathes!
Ah, spare your idol! think him human still.
Charms he may have, but he has frailties too;
Dote not too much, nor spoil what ye admire.

All truth is from the sempiternal source
Of light divine. But Egypt, Greece, and Rome,
Drew from the stream below. More favour'd, we
Drink, when we choose it, at the fountain-head.
To them it flow'd much mingled and defiled
With hurtful error, prejudice, and dreams
Illusive of philosophy, so call'd,

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But falsely. Sages after sages strove
In vain to filter off a crystal draught
Pure from the lees, which often more enhanced
The thirst than slaked it, and not seldom bred
Intoxication and delirium wild.
In vain they push'd inquiry to the birth
And spring-time of the world; ask'd, Whence is man?
Why form'd at all? and wherefore as he is?
Where must he find his Maker? With what rites
Adore Him? Will He hear, accept, and bless?
Or does He sit regardless of His works?
Has man within him an immortal seed?
Or does the tomb take all? If he survive
His ashes, where? and in what weal or wo?
Knots worthy of solution, which alone
A Deity could solve. Their answers, vague
And all at random, fabulous and dark,
Left them as dark themselves. Their rules of life,
Defective and unsanction'd, proved too weak
To bind the roving appetite, and lead
Blind nature to a God not yet reveal'd.
'Tis revelation satisfies all doubts,
Explains all mysteries except her own,
And so illuminates the path of life,
That fools discover it, and stray no more.
Now tell me, dignified and sapient sir,
My man of morals, nurtured in the shades
Of Academus — is this false or true?
Is Christ the abler teacher, or the schools?
If Christ, then why resort at every turn
To Athens or to Rome, for wisdom short
Of man's occasions, when in Him reside
Grace, knowledge, comfort — an unfathom'd store?
How oft, when Paul has served us with a text,
Has Epictetus, Plato, Tully, preach'd!
Men that, if now alive, would sit content
And humble learners of a Saviour's worth,
Preach it who might. Such was their love of truth,
Their thirst of knowledge, and their candour too.
And thus it is. — The pastor, either vain
By nature, or by flattery made so, taught

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To gaze at his own splendour, and to exalt
Absurdly, not his office, but himself;
Or unenlighten'd, and too proud to learn;
Or vicious, and not therefore apt to teach:
Perverting often by the stress of lewd
And loose example, whom he should instruct;
Exposes, and holds up to broad disgrace,
The noblest function, and discredits much
The brightest truths that man has ever seen.
For ghostly counsel — if it either fall
Below the exigence, or be not back'd
With show of love, at least with hopeful proof
Of some sincerity on the giver's part;
Or be dishonour'd in the exterior form
And mode of its conveyance by such tricks
As move derision, or by foppish airs
And histrionic mummery, that let down
The pulpit to the level of the stage —
Drops from the lips a disregarded thing.
The weak perhaps are moved, but are not taught,
While prejudice in men of stronger minds
Takes deeper root, confirm'd by what they see.
A relaxation of religion's hold
Upon the roving and untutor'd heart
Soon follows, and, the curb of conscience snapt,
The laity run wild. — But do they now?
Note their extravagance, and be convinced.
As nations, ignorant of God, contrive
A wooden one; so we, no longer taught
By monitors that mother church supplies,
Now make our own. Posterity will ask,
(If e'er posterity see verse of mine,)
Some fifty or a hundred lustrums hence,
What was a monitor in George's days?
My very gentle reader, yet unborn,
Of whom I needs must augur better things,
Since Heaven would sure grow weary of a world
Productive only of a race like ours,
A monitor is wood — plank shaven thin:
We wear it at our backs. There, closely braced
And neatly fitted, it compresses hard

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The prominent and most unsightly bones,
And binds the shoulders flat. We prove its use
Sovereign and most effectual to secure
A form, not now gymnastic as of yore,
From rickets and distortion, else our lot.
But thus admonish'd, we can walk erect —
One proof at least of manhood! while the friend
Sticks close, a Mentor worthy of his charge.
Our habits, costlier than Lucullus wore,
And by caprice as multiplied as his,
Just please us while the fashion is at full,
But change with every moon. The sycophant,
Who waits to dress us, arbitrates their date;
Surveys his fair reversion with keen eye;
Finds one ill made, another obsolete,
This fits not nicely, that is ill conceived;
And making prize of all that he condemns,
With our expenditure defrays his own.
Variety's the very spice of life,
That gives it all its flavour. We have run
Through every change that fancy, at the loom
Exhausted, has had genius to supply;
And, studious of mutation still, discard
A real elegance, a little used,
For monstrous novelty and strange disguise.
We sacrifice to dress, till household joys
And comforts cease. Dress drains our cellar dry,
And keeps our larder lean; puts out our fires;
And introduces hunger, frost, and wo,
Where peace and hospitality might reign.
What man that lives, and that knows how to live,
Would fail to exhibit at the public shows
A form as splendid as the proudest there,
Though appetite raise outcries at the cost?
A man of the town dines late, but soon enough
With reasonable forecast and despatch,
To ensure a side-box station at half-price.
You think perhaps, so delicate his dress,
His daily fare as delicate. Alas!
He picks clean teeth, and, busy as he seems
With an old tavern quill, is hungry yet.

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The rout is Folly's circle, which she draws
With magic wand. So potent is the spell,
That none, decoy'd into that fatal ring,
Unless by Heaven's peculiar grace, escape.
There we grow early gray, but never wise;
There form connections, but acquire no friend;
Solicit pleasure hopeless of success;
Waste youth in occupations only fit
For second childhood, and devote old age
To sports, which only childhood could excuse.
There they are happiest who dissemble best
Their weariness; and they the most polite
Who squander time and treasure with a smile,
Though at their own destruction. She that asks
Her dear five hundred friends, contemns them all,
And hates their coming. They—what can they less?—
Make just reprisals; and with cringe and shrug,
And bow obsequious, hide their hate of her.
All catch the frenzy, downward from her grace,
Whose flambeaux flash against the morning skies,
And gild our chamber ceilings as they pass,
To her who, frugal only that her thrift
May feed excesses she can ill afford,
Is hackney'd home unlackey'd; who, in haste
Alighting, turns the key in her own door,
And, at the watchman's lantern, borrowing light,
Finds a cold bed her only comfort left.
Wives beggar husbands, husbands starve their wives,
On Fortune's velvet altar offering up
Their last poor pittance—Fortune, most severe
Of godesses yet known, and costlier far
Than all that held their routs in Juno's heaven.—
So fare we in this prison-house, the World;
And 'tis a fearful spectacle to see
So many maniacs dancing in their chains.
They gaze upon the links that hold them fast
With eyes of anguish, execrate their lot,
Then shake them in despair, and dance again!
Now basket up the family of plagues
That waste our vitals: peculation, sale
Of honour, perjury, corruption, frauds

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By forgery, by subterfuge of law,
By tricks and lies as numerous and as keen
As the necessities their authors feel;
Then cast them, closely bundled, every brat
At the right door,—Profusion is the sire.
Profusion unrestrain'd, with all that's base
In character, has litter'd all the land,
And bred, within the memory of no few,
A priesthood, such as Baal's was of old,
A people, such as never was till now.
It is a hungry vice—it eats up all
That gives society its beauty, strength,
Convenience, and security, and use;
Makes men mere vermin, worthy to be trapp'd
And gibbeted, as fast as catchpole claws
Can seize the slippery prey; unties the knot
Of union, and converts the sacred band
That holds mankind together to a scourge.
Profusion, deluging a state with lusts
Of grossest nature, and of worst effects,
Prepares it for its ruin; hardens, blinds,
And warps, the consciences of public men,
Till they can laugh at virtue, mock the fools
That trust them; and in the end disclose a face,
That would have shock'd Credulity herself,
Unmask'd, vouchsafing this their sole excuse,—
Since all alike are selfish, why not they?
This does Profusion, and the accursed cause
Of such deep mischief has itself a cause.
  In colleges and halls, in ancient days,
When learning, virtue, piety, and truth,
Were precious, and inculcated with care,
There dwelt a sage call'd Discipline. His head,
Not yet by time completely silver'd o'er,
Bespoke him past the bounds of freakish youth,
But strong for service still, and unimpair'd.
His eye was meek and gentle, and a smile
Play'd on his lips; and in his speech was heard
Paternal sweetness, dignity, and love.
The occupation dearest to his heart
Was to encourage goodness. He would stroke

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The head of modest and ingenuous worth,
That blush'd at its own praise; and press the youth
Close to his side that pleased him. Learning grew
Beneath his care a thriving vigorous plant;
The mind was well inform'd, the passions held
Subordinate, and diligence was choice.
If e'er it chanced, as sometimes chance it must,
That one among so many overleap'd
The limits of control, his gentle eye
Grew stern, and darted a severe rebuke;
His frown was full of terror, and his voice
Shook the delinquent with such fits of awe,
As left him not, till penitence had won
Lost favour back again, and closed the breach.
But Discipline, a faithful servant long,
Declined at length into the vale of years:
A palsy struck his arm; his sparkling eye
Was quench'd in rheums of age; his voice, unstrung,
Grew tremulous, and drew derision more
Than reverence in perverse, rebellious youth.
So colleges and halls neglected much
Their good old friend; and Discipline at length,
O'erlook'd and unemploy'd, fell sick and died.
Then study languish'd, emulation slept,
And virtue fled. The schools became a scene
Of solemn farce, where Ignorance in stilts,
His cap well lined with logic not his own,
With parrot tongue perform'd the scholar's part,
Proceeding soon a graduated dunce.
Then compromise had place, and scrutiny
Became stone blind: precedence went in truck,
And he was competent whose purse was so.
A dissolution of all bonds ensued;
The curbs invented for the mulish mouth
Of headstrong youth were broken; bars and bolts
Grew rusty by disuse; and massy gates
Forgot their office, opening with a touch;
Till gowns at length are found mere masquerade,
The tassel'd cap, and the spruce band a jest,
A mockery of the world! What need of these
For gamesters, jockeys, brothellers impure,

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Spendthrifts, and booted sportsmen, oftener seen
With belted waist and pointers at their heels,
Than in the bounds of duty? What was learn'd,
If aught was learn'd, in childhood, is forgot;
And such expense, as pinches parents blue,
And mortifies the liberal hand of love,
Is squander'd in pursuit of idle sports
And vicious pleasures; buys the boy a name
That sits a stigma on his father's house,
And cleaves through life inseparably close
To him that wears it. What can after-games
Of riper joys and commerce with the world,
The lewd vain world, that must receive him soon,
Add to such erudition, thus acquired,
Where science and where virtue are profess'd?
They may confirm his habits, rivet fast
His folly, but to spoil him is a task
That bids defiance to the united powers
Of fashion, dissipation, taverns, stews.
Now blame we most the nurslings or the nurse?
The children crook'd, and twisted, and deform'd,
Through want of care; or her, whose winking eye
And slumbering oscitancy mars the brood?
The nurse, no doubt. Regardless of her charge,
She needs herself correction; needs to learn,
That it is dangerous sporting with the world,
With things so sacred as a nation's trust,
The nurture of her youth, her dearest pledge.
All are not such. I had a brother once—
Peace to the memory of a man of worth,
A man of letters, and of manners too!
Of manners sweet, as virtue always wears
When gay good-nature dresses her in smiles.
He graced a college,* in which order yet
Was sacred; and was honour'd, loved, and wept,
By more than one, themselves conspicuous there.
Some minds are temper'd happily, and mix'd
With such ingredients of good sense, and taste
Of what is excellent in man, they thirst
With such a zeal to be what they approve,

* Ben'et Coll. Cambridge.

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That no restraints can circumscribe them more
Than they themselves by choice, for wisdom's sake.
Nor can example hurt them: what they see
Of vice in others but enhancing more
The charms of virtue in their just esteem.
If such escape contagion, and emerge
Pure from so foul a pool to shine abroad,
And give the world their talents and themselves,
Small thanks to those whose negligence or sloth
Exposed their inexperience to the snare,
And left them to an undirected choice.
  See then the quiver broken and decay'd,
In which are kept our arrows. Rusting there
In wild disorder, and unfit for use,
What wonder if, discharged into the world,
They shame their shooters with a random flight,
Their points obtuse, and feathers drunk with wine!
Well may the church wage unsuccessful war
With such artillery arm'd. Vice parries wide
The undreaded volley with a sword of straw,
And stands an impudent and fearless mark.[3]
  Have we not track'd the felon home, and found
His birth-place and his dam? The country mourns,
Mourns because every plague that can infest
Society, and that saps and worms the base
Of the edifice that policy has raised,
Swarms in all quarters: meets the eye, the ear,
And suffocates the breath at every turn.
Profusion breeds them; and the cause itself
Of that calamitous mischief has been found:
Found, too, where most offensive, — in the skirts
Of the robed pedagogue! Else let the arraign'd
Stand up unconscious, and refute the charge.
So when the Jewish leader stretch'd his arm,
And waved his rod divine, a race obscene,
Spawn'd in the muddy beds of Nile, came forth,
Polluting Egypt: gardens, fields, and plains,
Were cover'd with the pest; the streets were fill'd;
The croaking nuisance lurk'd in every nook;
Nor palaces, nor even chambers, 'scaped;
And the land stank — so numerous was the fry.[4]

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THE TASK.

BOOK III.

THE GARDEN.

ARGUMENT OF THE THIRD BOOK.

Self-recollection and reproof. — Address to domestic happiness. — Some account of myself. — The vanity of many of their pursuits who are reputed wise. — Justification of my censures. — Divine illumination necessary to the most expert philosopher. — The question, What is truth? answered by other questions. — Domestic happiness addressed again. — Few lovers of the country. — My tame hare. — Occupations of a retired gentleman in his garden. — Pruning. — Framing. — Green-house. — Sowing of flower-seeds. — The country preferable to the town even in winter. — Reasons why it is deserted at that season. — Ruinous effects of gaming, and of expensive improvement. — Book concludes with an apostrophe to the metropolis.

As one, who long in thickets and in brakes
Entangled, winds now this way and now that
His devious course uncertain, seeking home;
Or, having long in miry ways been foil'd
And sore discomfited, from slough to slough
Plunging, and half despairing of escape,
If chance at length he find a greensward smooth
And faithful to the foot, his spirits rise,
He cherups brisk his ear-erecting steed,
And winds his way with pleasure and with ease:
So I, designing other themes, and call'd
To adorn the Sofa with eulogium due,
To tell its slumbers, and to paint its dreams,
Have rambled wide: in country, city, seat
Of academic fame (howe'er deserved)
Long held, and scarcely disengaged at last.
But now with pleasant pace a cleanlier road
I mean to tread: I feel myself at large,

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Courageous, and refresh'd for future toil,
If toil await me, or if dangers new.
  Since pulpits fail, and sounding boards reflect
Most part an empty, ineffectual sound,
What chance that I, to fame so little known,
Nor conversant with men or manners much,
Should speak to purpose, or with better hope
Crack the satiric thong? 'Twere wiser far
For me, enamour'd of sequester'd scenes,
And charm'd with rural beauty, to repose,
Where chance may throw me, beneath elm or vine,
My languid limbs, when summer sears the plains,
Or, when rough winter rages, on the soft
And shelter'd sofa, while the nitrous air
Feeds a blue flame, and makes a cheerful hearth;[1]
There, undisturb'd by folly, and apprised
How great the danger of disturbing her,
To muse in silence, or at least confine
Remarks that gall so many to the few,
My partners in retreat. Disgust conceal'd
Is ofttimes proof of wisdom, when the fault
Is obstinate, and cure beyond our reach.
  Domestic happiness, thou only bliss
Of Paradise that hast survived the fall!
Though few now taste thee unimpair'd and pure,
Or tasting, long enjoy thee, too infirm,
Or too incautious, to preserve thy sweets
Unmixt with drops of bitter, which neglect
Or temper sheds into thy crystal cup;
Thou art the nurse of virtue, in thine arms
She smiles, appearing, as in truth she is,
Heaven-born, and destined to the skies again.
Thou art not known where pleasure is adored,
That reeling goddess with the zoneless waist
And wandering eyes, still leaning on the arm
Of novelty, her fickle, frail support;
For thou art meek and constant, hating change,
And finding in the calm of truth-tried love
Joys that her stormy raptures never yield.
Forsaking thee, what shipwreck have we made
Of honour, dignity, and fair renown!

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Till prostitution elbows us aside
In all our crowded streets; and senates seem
Convened for purposes of empire less
Than to release the adulteress from her bond.
The adulteress! what a theme for angry verse,
What provocation to the indignant heart
That feels for injured love! but I disdain
The nauseous task to paint her as she is,
Cruel, abandon'd, glorying in her shame.
No. Let her pass, and, charioted along
In guilty splendour, shake the public ways;
The frequency of crimes has wash'd them white,
And verse of mine shall never brand the wretch,
Whom matrons now, of character unsmirch'd,
And chaste themselves, are not ashamed to own.
Virtue and vice had boundaries in old time,
Not to be pass'd: and she, that had renounced
Her sex's honour, was renounced herself
By all that prized it; not for prudery's sake,
But dignity's, resentful of the wrong.
'Twas hard perhaps on here and there a waif,
Desirous to return, and not received,
But 'twas a wholesome rigour in the main,
And taught the unblemish'd to preserve with care
That purity, whose loss was loss of all.
Men, too, were nice in honour in those days,
And judged offenders well. Then he that sharp'd,
And pocketed a prize by fraud obtain'd,
Was mark'd and shunn'd as odious. He that sold
His country, or was slack when she required
His every nerve in action and at stretch,
Paid with the blood that he had basely spared
The price of his default. But now, yes, now
We are become so candid and so fair,
So liberal in construction, and so rich
In Christian charity, (good natured age!)
That they are safe, sinners of either sex,
Transgress what laws they may. Well dress'd, well bred,
Well equipaged, is ticket good enough
To pass us readily through every door.
Hypocrisy, detest her as we may,

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(And no man's hatred ever wrong'd her yet,)
May claim this merit still, — that she admits
The worth of what she mimics with such care,
And thus gives virtue indirect applause;*
But she has burnt her mask, not needed here,
Where vice has such allowance, that her shifts
And specious semblances have lost their use.
I was a stricken deer, that left the herd
Long since; with many an arrow deep infix'd
My panting side was charged, when I withdrew
To seek a tranquil death in distant shades.
There was I found by one who had Himself
Been hurt by th' archers. In his side he bore,
And in his hands and feet, the cruel scars.
With gentle force soliciting the darts,
He drew them forth, and heal'd, and bade me live.
Since then, with few associates, in remote
And silent woods I wander, far from those
My former partners of the peopled scene —
With few associates, and not wishing more.
Here much I ruminate, as much I may,
With other views of men and manners now
Than once, and others of a life to come.
I see that all are wanderers, gone astray
Each in his own delusions; they are lost
In chase of fancied happiness, still woo'd
And never won. Dream after dream ensues,
And still they dream that they shall still succeed,
And still are disappointed; rings the world
With the vain stir. I sum up half mankind,
And add two-thirds of the remaining half,
And find the total of their hopes and fears
Dreams — empty dreams. The million flit as gay
As if created only like the fly,
That spreads his motley wings in the eye of noon,
To sport their season, and be seen no more.
The rest are sober dreamers, grave and wise,
And pregnant with discoveries new and rare.

* Hypocrisy is the constrained homage which vice pays to virtue.—De la Rochefoucauld.

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Some write a narrative of wars, and feats
Of heroes little known, and call the rant
A history; describe the man, of whom
His own coevals took but little note,
And paint his person, character, and views,
As they had known him from his mother's womb.
They disentangle from the puzzled skein,
In which obscurity has wrapp'd them up,
The threads of politic and shrewd design
That ran through all his purposes, and charge
His mind with meanings that he never had,
Or, having, kept conceal'd. Some drill and bore
The solid earth, and from the strata ther
Extract a register, by which we learn,
That He who made it, and reveal'd its date
To Moses, was mistaken in its age.
Some more acute, and more industrious still,
Contrive creation; travel Nature up
To the sharp peak of her sublimest height,
And tell us whence the stars; why some are fix'd,
And planetary some; what gave them first
Rotation, from what fountain flow'd their light.
Great contest follows, and much learned dust
Involves the combatants; each claiming truth,
And truth disclaiming both. And thus they spend
The little wick of life's poor shallow lamp
In playing tricks with Nature, giving laws
To distant worlds, and trifling in their own.
Is 't not a pity now, that tickling rheums
Should ever tease the lungs and blear the sight
Of oracles like these? Great pity too,
That having wielded the elements, and built
A thousand systems, each in his own way,
They should go out in fume, and be forgot?
Ah! what is life thus spent? and what are they
But frantic, who thus spend it? all for smoke—
Eternity for bubbles proves at last
A senseless bargain. When I see such games
Play'd by the creatures of a Power, who swears
That He will judge the earth, and call the fool
To a sharp reckoning that has lived in vain;

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And when I weigh this seeming wisdom well,
And prove it in the infallible result
So hollow and so false — I feel my heart
Dissolve in pity, and account the learn'd,
If this be learning, most of all deceived.
Great crimes alarm the conscience, but it sleeps
While thoughtful man is plausibly amused.
Defend me, therefore, common sense, say I,
From reveries so airy, from the toil
Of dropping buckets into empty wells,
And growing old in drawing nothing up!
'Twere well, says one, sage, erudite, profound,
Terribly arch'd and aquiline his nose,
And overbuilt with most impending brows,
'Twere well, could you permit the world to live
As the world pleases: what's the world to you?
Much. I was born of woman, and drew milk,
As sweet as charity, from human breasts.
I think, articulate, I laugh and weep,
And exercise all functions of a man.
How, then, should I, and any man that lives,
Be strangers to each other? Pierce my vein,
Take of the crimson stream meandering there,
And catechise it well; apply thy glass,
Search it, and prove now if it be not blood
Congenial with thine own: and, if it be,
What edge of subtlety canst thou suppose
Keen enough, wise and skilful as thou art,
To cut the link of brotherhood by which
One common Maker bound me to the kind?
True; I am no proficient, I confess,
In arts like yours. I cannot call the swift
And perilous lightnings from the angry clouds,
And bid them hide themselves in earth beneath;
I cannot analyze the air, nor catch
The parallax of yonder luminous point,
That seems half quench'd in the immense abyss:
Such powers I boast not — neither can I rest
A silent witness of the headlong rage,
Or heedless folly, by which thousands die,
Bone of my bone, and kindred souls to mine.

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God never meant that man should scale the heavens
By strides of human wisdom. In his works,
Though wondrous, he commands us in his word
To seek him rather, where his mercy shines.
The mind, indeed, enlighten'd from above,
Views him in all; ascribes to the grand cause
The grand effect; acknowledges with joy
His manner, and with rapture tastes his style.
But never yet did philosophic tube,
That brings the planets home unto the eye
Of observation, and discovers, else
Not visible, his family of worlds,
Discover Him that rules them; such a veil
Hangs over mortal eyes, blind from the birth,
And dark in things divine. Full often too
Our wayward intellect, the more we learn
Of nature, overlooks her Author more;
From instrumental causes proud to draw
Conclusions retrograde, and mad mistake.
But if His word once teach us, shoot a ray
Through all the heart's dark chambers, and reveal
Truths undiscern'd but by that holy light,
Then all is plain. Philosophy, baptized
In the pure fountain of eternal love,
Has eyes indeed; and viewing all she sees
As meant to indicate a God to man,
Gives HIM his praise, and forfeits not her own.
Learning has borne such fruit in other days
On all her branches: piety has found
Friends in the friends of science, and true prayer
Has flow'd from lips wet with Castalian dews.
Such was thy wisdom, Newton, child-like sage!
Sagacious reader of the works of God,
And in his word sagacious. Such too thine,
Milton, whose genius had angelic wings,
And fed on manna! And such thine, in whom
Our British Themis gloried with just cause,
Immortal Hale; for deep discernment praised,
And sound integrity, not more than famed
For sanctity of manners undefiled.*

* See Note 2 to Book II.

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All flesh is grass, and all its glory fades
Like the fair flower dishevell'd in the wind;
Riches have wings, and grandeur is a dream
The man we celebrate must find a tomb,
And we that worship him ignoble graves.
Nothing is proof against the general curse
Of vanity, that seizes all below
The only amaranthine flower on earth
Is virtue; the only lasting treasure, truth.
But what is truth?—'twas Pilate's question put
To Truth itself, that deign'd him no reply.
And wherefore? will not God impart his light
To them that ask it?—Freely—'tis his joy,
His glory, and his nature, to impart.
But to the proud, uncandid, insincere,
Or negligent inquirer, not a spark.
What's that which brings contempt upon a book,
And him who writes it, though the style be neat,
The method clear, and argument exact?
That makes a minister in holy things
The joy of many, and the dread of more,
His name a theme for praise and for reproach?
That, while it gives us worth in God's account,
Depreciates and undoes us in our own?
What pearl is it that rich men cannot buy,
That learning is too proud to gather up;
But which the poor, and the despised of all,
Seek and obtain, and often find unsought?
Tell me—and I will tell thee what is truth.

Oh, friendly to the best pursuits of man,
Friendly to thought, to virtue, and to peace,
Domestic life in rural leisure pass'd!
Few know thy value, and few taste thy sweets;
Though many boast thy favours, and affect
To understand and choose thee for their own.
But foolish man foregoes his proper bliss,
E'en as his first progenitor, and quits,
Though placed in paradise, (for earth has still
Some traces of her youthful beauty left,)
Substantial happiness for transient joy.
Scenes form'd for contemplation, and to nurse

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The growing seeds of wisdom; that suggest,
By every pleasing image they present,
Reflections such as meliorate the heart,
Compose the passions, and exalt the mind;
Scenes such as these 'tis his supreme delight
To fill with riot and defile with blood.
Should some contagion, kind to the poor brutes
We persecute, annihilate the tribes
That draw the sportsman over hill and dale
Fearless, and rapt away from all his cares;
Should never game-fowl hatch her eggs again,
Nor baited hook deceive the fish's eye;
Could pageantry and dance, and feast and song,
Be quell'd in all our summer months' retreats;
How many self-deluded nymphs and swains,
Who dream they have a taste for fields and groves,
Would find them hideous nurseries of the spleen,
And crowd the roads, impatient for the town!
They love the country, and none else, who seek
For their own sake its silence and its shade;
Delights which who would leave that has a heart
Susceptible of pity, or a mind
Cultured and capable of sober thought,
For all the savage din of the swift pack,
And clamours of the field?—Detested sport,
That owes its pleasures to another's pain;
That feeds upon the sobs and dying shrieks
Of harmless nature, dumb, but yet endued
With eloquence, that agonies inspire,
Of silent tears and heart-distending sighs!
Vain tears, alas! and sighs that never find
A corresponding tone in jovial souls.
Well—one at least is safe. One shelter'd hare
Has never heard the sanguinary yell
Of cruel man, exulting in her woes.
Innocent partner of my peaceful home,
Whom ten long years' experience of my care
Has made at last familiar; she has lost
Much of her vigilant instinctive dread,
Not needful here, beneath a roof like mine.
Yes—thou may'st eat thy bread, and lick the hand
That feeds thee; thou may'st frolic on the floor

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At evening, and at night retire secure
To thy straw couch, and slumber unalarm'd;
For I have gain'd thy confidence, have pledged
All that is human in me to protect
Thine unsuspecting gratitude and love.
If I survive thee, I will dig thy grave;
And, when I place thee in it, sighing say,
I knew at least one hare that had a friend.[2]

How various his employments, whom the world
Calls idle, and who justly in return
Esteems that busy world an idler too!
Friends, books, a garden, and perhaps his pen,
Delightful industry, enjoy'd at home,
And Nature in her cultivated trim
Dress'd to his taste, inviting him abroad,—
Can he want occupation who has these?
Will he be idle who has much to enjoy?
Me, therefore, studious of laborious ease,
Not slothful; happy to deceive the time,
Not waste it; and aware that human life
Is but a loan, to be repaid with use
When He shall call his debtors to account,
From whom are all our blessings; business finds
Even here: while sedulous I seek to improve,
At least neglect not, or leave unemploy'd,
The mind he gave me; driving it, though slack
Too oft, and much impeded in its work
By causes not to be divulged in vain,
To its just point — the service of mankind.
He that attends to his interior self,
That has a heart, and keeps it; has a mind
That hungers, and supplies it; and who seeks
A social, not a dissipated life,
Has business; feels himself engaged to achieve
No unimportant, though a silent task.
A life all turbulence and noise may seem
To him that leads it wise, and to be praised;
But wisdom is a pearl with most success
Sought in still water, and beneath clear skies.
He that is ever occupied in storms,

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Or dives not for it, or brings up instead,
Vainly industrious, a disgraceful prize.
The morning finds the self-sequester'd man
Fresh for his task, intend what task he may.
Whether inclement seasons recommend
His warm but simple home, where he enjoys
With her, who shares his pleasures and his heart,
Sweet converse, sipping calm the fragrant lymph,
Which neatly she prepares; then to his book
Well chosen, and not sullenly perused
In selfish silence, but imparted oft,
As aught occurs, that she may smile to hear,
Or turn to nourishment, digested well.[3]
Or if the garden, with its many cares,
All well repaid, demand him, he attends
The welcome call, conscious how much the hand
Of lubbard labour needs his watchful eye,
Oft loitering lazily, if not o'erseen,
Or misapplying his unskilful strength.
Nor does he govern only or direct,
But much performs himself. No works, indeed,
That ask robust, tough sinews, bred to toil,
Servile employ; but such as may amuse,
Not tire, demanding rather skill than force.
Proud of his well-spread walls, he views his trees,
That meet, no barren interval between,
With pleasure more than e'en their fruits afford,
Which, save himself who trains them, none can feel.
These therefore are his own peculiar charge;
No meaner hand may discipline the shoots,
None but his steel approach them. What is weak,
Distemper'd, or has lost prolific powers,
Impair'd by age, his unrelenting hand
Dooms to the knife: nor does he spare the soft
And succulent, that feeds its giant growth,
But barren, at th' expense of neighbouring twigs
Less ostentatious, and yet studded thick
With hopeful gems. The rest, no portion left
That may disgrace his art, or disappoint
Large expectation, he disposes neat

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At measured distances, that air and sun,
Admitted freely, may afford their aid,
And ventilate and warm the swelling buds.
Hence summer has her riches, autumn hence,
And hence e'en winter fills his wither'd hand
With blushing fruits, and plenty not his own.*
Fair recompense of labour well bestow'd,
And wise precaution; which a clime so rude
Makes needful still, whose spring is but the child
Of churlish winter, in her froward moods
Discovering much the temper of her sire.
For oft, as if in her the stream of mild
Maternal nature had reversed its course,
She brings her infants forth with many smiles;
But once deliver'd kills them with a frown.
He therefore, timely warn'd, himself supplies
Her want of care, screening and keeping warm
The plenteous bloom, that no rough blast may sweep
His garlands from the boughs. Again, as oft
As the sun peeps and vernal airs breathe mild,
The fence withdrawn, he gives them every beam,
And spreads his hopes before the blaze of day.
To raise the prickly and green-coated gourd,
So grateful to the palate, and when rare
So coveted, else base and disesteem'd,
Food for the vulgar merely, is an art
That toiling ages have but just matured,
And at this moment unessay'd in song.
Yet gnats have had, and frogs and mice, long since,
Their eulogy; those sang the Mantuan bard,
And these the Grecian, in ennobling strains;
And in thy numbers, Phillips, shines for aye
The solitary Shilling.[4] Pardon then,
Ye sage dispensers of poetic fame,
The ambition of one meaner far, whose powers,
Presuming an attempt not less sublime,
Pant for the praise of dressing to the taste
Of critic appetite, no sordid fare,
A cucumber, while costly yet and scarce.[5]

* Miraturque novos fructus et non sua poma. VIRG.—*Author's Note.*

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The stable yields a stercoraceous heap,
Impregnated with quick fermenting salts,
And potent to resist the freezing blast;
For, ere the beech and elm have cast their leaf
Deciduous, when now November dark
Checks vegetation in the torpid plant
Exposed to his cold breath, the task begins.
Warily, therefore, and with prudent heed,
He seeks a favour'd spot; that where he builds
The agglomerated pile his frame may front
The sun's meridian disk, and at the back
Enjoy close shelter, wall, or reeds, or hedge
Impervious to the wind. First he bids spread
Dry fern or litter'd hay, that may imbibe
The ascending damps; then leisurely impose,
And lightly, shaking it with agile hand
From the full fork, the saturated straw.
What longest binds the closest forms secure
The shapely side, that as it rises takes,
By just degrees, an overhanging breadth,
Sheltering the base with its projected eaves;
The uplifted frame, compact at every joint,
And overlaid with clear translucent glass,
He settles next upon the sloping mount,
Whose sharp declivity shoots off secure
From the dash'd pane the deluge as it falls:
He shuts it close, and the first labour ends.
Thrice must the voluble and restless earth
Spin round upon her axle, ere the warmth,
Slow gathering in the midst, through the square mass
Diffused, attain the surface: when, behold!
A pestilent and most corrosive steam,
Like a gross fog Boeotian, rising fast,
And fast condensed upon the dewy sash,
Asks egress; which obtain'd, the overcharged
And drench'd conservatory breathes abroad,
In volumes wheeling slow, the vapour dank;
And, purified, rejoices to have lost
Its foul inhabitant. But to assuage
The impatient fervour, which it first conceives
Within its reeking bosom, threatening death

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To his young hopes, requires discreet delay.
Experience, slow preceptress, teaching oft
The way to glory by miscarriage foul,
Must prompt him, and admonish how to catch
The auspicious moment, when the temper'd heat,
Friendly to vital motion, may afford
Soft fomentation, and invite the seed.
The seed, selected wisely, plump, and smooth,
And glossy, he commits to pots of size
Diminutive, well fill'd with well-prepared
And fruitful soil, that has been treasured long,
And drank no moisture from the dripping clouds.
These on the warm and genial earth, that hides
The smoking manure, and o'erspreads it all,
He places lightly, and, as time subdues
The rage of fermentation, plunges deep
In the soft medium, till they stand immersed.
Then rise the tender germs, upstarting quick,
And spreading wide their spongy lobes; at first
Pale, wan, and livid; but assuming soon,
If fann'd by balmy and nutritious air,
Strain'd through the friendly mats, a vivid green.
Two leaves produced, two rough indented leaves,
Cautious he pinches from the second stalk
A pimple, that portends a future sprout,
And interdicts its growth. Thence straight succeed
The branches, sturdy to his utmost wish;
Prolific all, and harbingers of more.
The crowded roots demand enlargement now,
And transplantation into ampler space.
Indulged in what they wish, they soon supply
Large foliage, overshadowing golden flowers,
Blown on the summit of the apparent fruit.
These have their sexes! and, when summer shines,
The bee transports the fertilizing meal
From flower to flower, and even the breathing air
Wafts the rich prize to its appointed use.
Not so when winter scowls. Assistant art
Then acts in Nature's office, brings to pass
The glad espousals, and ensures the crop.

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Grudge not, ye rich, (since Luxury must have
His dainties, and the world's more numerous half
Lives by contriving delicates for you,)
Grudge not the cost. Ye little know the cares,
The vigilance, the labour, and the skill,
That day and night are exercised, and hang
Upon the ticklish balance of suspense,
That ye may garnish your profuse regales
With summer fruits brought forth by wintry suns.
Ten thousand dangers lie in wait to thwart
The process. Heat and cold, and wind, and steam,
Moisture and drought, mice, worms, and swarming flies,
Minute as dust, and numberless, oft work
Dire disappointment, that admits no cure,
And which no care can obviate. It were long,
Too long, to tell the expedients and the shifts,
Which he that fights a season so severe
Devises, while he guards his tender trust;
And oft at last in vain. The learn'd and wise
Sarcastic would exclaim, and judge the song
Cold as its theme, and like its theme the fruit
Of too much labour, worthless when produced.

Who loves a garden loves a greenhouse too.
Unconscious of a less propitious clime,
There blooms exotic beauty, warm and snug,
While the winds whistle, and the snows descend.
The spiry myrtle with unwithering leaf
Shines there, and flourishes. The golden boast
Of Portugal and western India there,
The ruddier orange, and the paler lime,
Peep through their polish'd foliage at the storm,
And seem to smile at what they need not fear.
The amomum there with intermingling flowers
And cherries hangs her twigs. Geranium boasts
Her crimson honours; and the spangled beau,
Ficoides, glitters bright the winter long.
All plants, of every leaf, that can endure
The winter's frown, if screen'd from his shrewd bite,
Live there, and prosper. Those Ausonia claims,
Levantine regions these; the Azores send

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Their jessamine, her jessamine remote
Caffraia:* foreigners from many lands,
They form one social shade, as if convened
By magic summons of the Orphean lyre.
Yet just arrangement, rarely brought to pass
But by a master's hand, disposing well
The gay diversities of leaf and flower,
Must lend its aid to illustrate all their charms,
And dress the regular yet various scene.
Plant behind plant aspiring, in the van
The dwarfish, in the rear retired, but still
Sublime above the rest, the statelier stand.
So once were ranged the sons of ancient Rome,
A noble show! while Roscius trod the stage;
And so, while Garrick, as renown'd as he,
The sons of Albion, fearing each to lose
Some note of Nature's music from his lips,
And covetous of Shakespeare's beauty, seen
In every flash of his far-beaming eye.
Nor taste alone and well-contrived display
Suffice to give the marshall'd ranks the grace
Of their complete effect. Much yet remains
Unsung, and many cares are yet behind,
And more laborious; cares on which depend
Their vigour, injured soon, not soon restored.
The soil must be renew'd, which, often wash'd,
Loses its treasure of salubrious salts,
And disappoints the roots; the slender roots
Close interwoven, where they meet the vase
Must smooth be shorn away; the sapless branch
Must fly before the knife; the wither'd leaf
Must be detach'd, and where it strews the floor
Swept with a woman's neatness, breeding else
Contagion, and disseminating death.
Discharge but these kind offices, (and who
Would spare, that loves them, offices like these?)
Well they reward the toil. The sight is pleased,
The scent regaled, each odoriferous leaf,

* The *Jasminum glaucum* and *angulare*, are natives of Southern Africa, and the *Jasminum azoricum* of the Azores; but why the poet has selected these does not appear.

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Each opening blossom, freely breathes abroad
Its gratitude, and thanks him with its sweets.
So manifold, all pleasing in their kind,
All healthful, are the employs of rural life,
Reiterated as the wheel of time
Runs round; still ending, and beginning still.
Nor are these all. To deck the shapely knoll,
That softly swell'd and gaily dress'd appears
A flowery island, from the dark green lawn
Emerging, must be deem'd a labour due
To no mean hand, and asks the touch of taste.
Here also grateful mixture of well-match'd
And sorted hues (each giving each relief,
And by contrasted beauty shining more)
Is needful. Strength may wield the ponderous spade,
May turn the clod, and wheel the compost home;
But elegance, chief grace the garden shews,
And most attractive, is the fair result
Of thought, the creature of a polish'd mind.
Without it all is gothic as the scene
To which the insipid citizen resorts
Near yonder heath; where industry mispent,
But proud of his uncouth ill-chosen task,
Has made a heaven on earth; with suns and moons
Of close-ramm'd stones has charged the encumber'd soil,
And fairly laid the zodiac in the dust.*
He therefore, who would see his flowers disposed
Sightly and in just order, ere he gives
The beds the trusted treasure of their seeds,
Forecasts the future whole; that when the scene
Shall break into its preconceived display,
Each for itself, and all as with one voice
Conspiring, may attest his bright design:
Nor even then, dismissing as perform'd
His pleasant work, may he suppose it done.
Few self-supported flowers endure the wind
Uninjured, but expect the upholding aid

* The neighbourhood of Olney is garnished by several of those square edifices, which, in the language of the guide books, are termed "elegant modern mansions," to some of which, beginning then to spring up, Cowper seems here to allude.

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Of the smooth-shaven prop, and, neatly tied,
Are wedded thus, like beauty to old age,
For interest sake, the living to the dead.
Some clothe the soil that feeds them, far diffused
And lowly creeping, modest and yet fair,
Like virtue, thriving most where little seen:
Some more aspiring catch the neighbour shrub
With clasping tendrils, and invest his branch,
Else unadorn'd, with many a gay festoon
And fragrant chaplet, recompensing well
The strength they borrow with the grace they lend.
All hate the rank society of weeds,
Noisome, and ever greedy to exhaust
The impoverish'd earth; an overbearing race,
That, like the multitude made faction-mad,
Disturb good order, and degrade true worth.
  Oh, blest seclusion from a jarring world,
Which he, thus occupied, enjoys! Retreat
Cannot indeed to guilty man restore
Lost innocence, or cancel follies past;
But it has peace, and much secures the mind
From all assaults of evil; proving still
A faithful barrier, not o'erleap'd with ease
By vicious custom, raging uncontroll'd
Abroad, and desolating public life.
When fierce temptation, seconded within
By traitor appetite, and arm'd with darts
Temper'd in hell, invades the throbbing breast,
To combat may be glorious, and success
Perhaps may crown us; but to fly is safe.
Had I the choice of sublunary good,
What could I wish that I possess not here?
Health, leisure, means to improve it, friendship, peace,
No loose or wanton, though a wandering, muse,
And constant occupation without care.
Thus blest I draw a picture of that bliss;
Hopeless, indeed, that dissipated minds,
And profligate abusers of a world
Created fair so much in vain for them,
Should seek the guiltless joys that I describe,
Allured by my report; but sure no less,

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That self-condemn'd they must neglect the prize,
And what they will not taste must yet approve.
What we admire we praise; and, when we praise,
Advance it into notice, that, its worth
Acknowledged, others may admire it too.
I therefore recommend, though at the risk
Of popular disgust, yet boldly still,
The cause of piety, and sacred truth,
And virtue, and those scenes which God ordain'd
Should best secure them and promote them most;
Scenes that I love, and with regret perceive
Forsaken, or through folly not enjoy'd.
Pure is the nymph, though liberal of her smiles,
And chaste, though unconfined, whom I extol.
Not as the prince in Shushan, when he call'd,
Vainglorious of her charms, his Vashti forth
To grace the full pavilion. His design
Was but to boast his own peculiar good,
Which all might view with envy, none partake.
My charmer is not mine alone; my sweets,
And she that sweetens all my bitters too,
Nature, enchanting Nature, in whose form
And lineaments divine I trace a hand
That errs not, and find raptures still renew'd,
Is free to all men — universal prize.
Strange that so fair a creature should yet want
Admirers, and be destined to divide
With meaner objects even the few she finds!
Stripp'd of her ornaments, her leaves and flowers,
She loses all her influence. Cities then
Attract us, and neglected Nature pines
Abandon'd, as unworthy of our love.
But are not wholesome airs, though unperfumed
By roses — and clear suns, though scarcely felt —
And groves, if inharmonious, yet secure
From clamour, and whose very silence charms —
To be preferr'd to smoke, to the eclipse
That metropolitan volcanoes make,
Whose Stygian throats breathe darkness all day long,
And to the stir of commerce, driving slow,
And thundering loud, with his ten thousand wheels?

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They would be, were not madness in the head,
And folly in the heart; were England now
What England was, plain, hospitable, kind,
And undebauch'd. But we have bid farewell
To all the virtues of those better days,
And all their honest pleasures. Mansions once
Knew their own masters; and laborious hinds,
Who had survived the father, served the son.
Now the legitimate and rightful lord
Is but a transient guest, newly arrived,
And soon to be supplanted. He that saw
His patrimonial timber cast its leaf,
Sells the last scantling, and transfers the price
To some shrewd sharper, ere it buds again.
Estates are landscapes, gazed upon a while,
Then advertised, and auctioneer'd away.
The country starves, and they that feed the o'ercharged
And surfeited lewd town with her fair dues,
By a just judgment strip and starve themselves.
The wings that waft our riches out of sight
Grow on the gamester's elbows; and the alert
And nimble motion of those restless joints
That never tire, soon fans them all away.
Improvement, too, the idol of the age,
Is fed with many a victim. Lo! he comes;
The omnipotent magician, Brown, appears.
Down falls the venerable pile, the abode
Of our forefathers, a grave, whisker'd race,
But tasteless. Springs a palace in its stead,
But in a distant spot; where more exposed
It may enjoy the advantage of the north,
And aguish east, till time shall have transform'd
Those naked acres to a sheltering grove.
He speaks: the lake in front becomes a lawn;
Woods vanish, hills subside, and valleys rise;
And streams, as if created for his use,
Pursue the track of his directing wand,
Sinuous or straight, now rapid and now slow,
Now murmuring soft, now roaring in cascades,
Even as he bids! The enraptured owner smiles.
'Tis finish'd, and yet, finish'd as it seems,

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Still wants a grace, the loveliest it could shew—
A mine to satisfy the enormous cost.
Drain'd to the last poor item of his wealth,
He sighs, departs, and leaves the accomplish'd plan
That he has touch'd, retouch'd, many a long day
Labour'd, and many a night pursued in dreams,
Just when it meets his hopes, and proves the heaven
He wanted, for a wealthier to enjoy!
And now perhaps the glorious hour is come,
When, having no stake left, no pledge to endear
Her interest, or that gives her sacred cause
A moment's operation on his love,
He burns with most intent and flagrant zeal
To serve his country. Ministerial grace
Deals him out money from the public chest;
Or, if that mine be shut, some private purse
Supplies his need with an usurious loan,
To be refunded duly, when his vote,
Well-managed, shall have earn'd its worthy price.
Oh innocent, compared with arts like these,
Crape, and cock'd pistol, and the whistling ball
Sent through the traveller's temples! He that finds
One drop of Heaven's sweet mercy in his cup,
Can dig, beg, rot, and perish, well content,
So he may wrap himself in honest rags
At his last gasp; but could not for a world
Fish up his dirty and dependent bread
From pools and ditches of the commonwealth,
Sordid and sickening at his own success.
  Ambition, avarice, penury incurr'd
By endless riot, vanity, the lust
Of pleasure and variety, despatch,
As duly as the swallows disappear,
The world of wandering knights and squires to town.
London ingulfs them all! The shark is there,
And the shark's prey; the spendthrift, and the leech
That sucks him. There the sycophant, and he
Who, with bareheaded and obsequious bows,
Begs a warm office, doom'd to a cold jail
And groat per diem, if his patron frown.
The levee swarms, as if in golden pomp

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Were character'd on every statesman's door,
"BATTER'D AND BANKRUPT FORTUNES MENDED HERE."
These are the charms that sully and eclipse
The charms of Nature. 'Tis the cruel gripe
That lean, hard-handed poverty inflicts,
The hope of better things, the chance to win,
The wish to shine, the thirst to be amused,
That at the sound of winter's hoary wing
Unpeople all our counties of such herds
Of fluttering, loitering, cringing, begging, loose
And wanton vagrants, as make London, vast
And boundless as it is, a crowded coop.
  Oh thou, resort and mart of all the earth,
Chequer'd with all complexions of mankind,
And spotted with all crimes; in whom I see
Much that I love, and more that I admire,
And all that I abhor; thou freckled fair,
That pleasest and yet shock'st me, I can laugh,
And I can weep, can hope, and can despond,
Feel wrath and pity, when I think on thee!
Ten righteous would have saved a city once,
And thou hast many righteous. Well for thee—
That salt preserves thee; more corrupted else,
And therefore more obnoxious, at this hour,
Than Sodom in her day had power to be,
For whom God heard his Abraham plead in vain.

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THE TASK.

BOOK IV.

THE WINTER EVENING.

ARGUMENT OF THE FOURTH BOOK.

The post comes in. — The newspaper is read. — The world contemplated at a distance. — Address to winter.—The rural amusements of a winter evening compared with the fashionable ones. — Address to evening. — A brown study. — Fall of snow in the evening. — The wagoner. — A poor family-piece. — The rural thief. — Public houses. — The multitude of them censured —The farmer's daughter—what she was — what she is. — The simplicity of country manners almost lost. — Causes of the change. — Desertion of the country by the rich. — Neglect of magistrates. — The militia principally in fault. — The new recruit and his transformation. — Reflection on bodies corporate. — The love of rural objects natural to all, and never to be totally extinguished.

HARK! 'tis the twanging horn! o'er yonder bridge,
That with its wearisome but needful length
Bestrides the wintry flood, in which the moon
Sees her unwrinkled face reflected bright, [1]
He comes, the herald of a noisy world,
With spatter'd boots, strapp'd waist, and frozen locks,
News from all nations lumbering at his back.
True to his charge, the close-pack'd load behind,
Yet careless what he brings, his one concern
Is to conduct it to the destined inn,
And, having dropp'd the expected bag, pass on.
He whistles as he goes, light-hearted wretch,
Cold and yet cheerful: messenger of grief
Perhaps to thousands, and of joy to some;
To him indifferent whether grief or joy.
Houses in ashes, and the fall of stocks,
Births, deaths, and marriages, epistles wet
With tears, that trickled down the writer's cheeks

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Fast as the periods from his fluent quill,
Or charged with amorous sighs of absent swains,
Or nymphs responsive — equally affect
His horse and him, unconscious of them all.
But oh, the important budget! usher'd in
With such heart-shaking music, who can say
What are its tidings? have our troops awaked?
Or do they still, as if with opium drugg'd,
Snore to the murmurs of the Atlantic wave?
Is India free? and does she wear her plumed
And jewell'd turban with a smile of peace,
Or do we grind her still? The grand debate,
The popular harangue, the tart reply,
The logic, and the wisdom, and the wit,
And the loud laugh,—I long to know them all;
I burn to set the imprison'd wranglers free,
And give them voice and utterance once again.
  Now stir the fire, and close the shutters fast,
Let fall the curtains, wheel the sofa round,
And while the bubbling and loud hissing urn
Throws up a steamy column, and the cups,
That cheer but not inebriate, wait on each,
So let us welcome peaceful evening in.
Not such his evening, who with shining face
Sweats in the crowded theatre, and, squeezed
And bored with elbow-points through both his sides,
Outscolds the ranting actor on the stage:
Nor his, who patient stands till his feet throb,
And his head thumps, to feed upon the breath
Of patriots, bursting with heroic rage,
Or placemen, all tranquillity and smiles.
This folio of four pages, happy work!
Which not even critics criticise; that holds
Inquisitive attention, while I read,
Fast bound in chains of silence, which the fair,
Though eloquent themselves, yet fear to break;
What is it, but a map of busy life,
Its fluctuations, and its vast concerns?
Here runs the mountainous and craggy ridge,
That tempts ambition. On the summit see
The seals of office glitter in his eyes;

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He climbs, he pants, he grasps them. At his heels,
Close at his heels, a demagogue ascends,
And with a dexterous jerk soon twists him down,
And wins them, but to lose them in his turn.
Here rills of oily eloquence in soft
Meanders lubricate the course they take;
The modest speaker is ashamed and grieved,
To engross a moment's notice, and yet begs,
Begs a propitious ear for his poor thoughts,
However trivial all that he conceives.
Sweet bashfulness! it claims at least this praise,—
The dearth of information and good sense,
That it foretells us, always comes to pass.
Cataracts of declamation thunder here,
There forests of no meaning spread the page
In which all comprehension wanders lost;
While fields of pleasantry amuse us there
With merry descants on a nation's woes.
The rest appears a wilderness of strange
But gay confusion: roses for the cheeks,
And lilies for the brows of faded age,
Teeth for the toothless, ringlets for the bald,
Heaven, earth, and ocean, plunder'd of their sweets,
Nectareous essences, Olympian dews,
Sermons, and city feasts, and favourite airs,
Ethereal journeys, submarine exploits,
And Katerfelto,* with his hair on end
At his own wonders, wondering for his bread.
'Tis pleasant, through the loopholes of retreat,
To peep at such a world; to see the stir
Of the great Babel, and not feel the crowd;
To hear the roar she sends through all her gates
At a safe distance, where the dying sound
Falls a soft murmur on the uninjured ear.
Thus sitting, and surveying thus at ease
The globe and its concerns, I seem advanced
To some secure and more than mortal height,
That liberates and exempts me from them all.
It turns submitted to my view, turns round

* A famous professor of legerdemain, at the time of writing this poem in the height of his reputation.

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With all its generations; I behold
The tumult, and am still. The sound of war
Has lost its terrors ere it reaches me;
Grieves, but alarms me not. I mourn the pride
And avarice that make man a wolf to man;
Hear the faint echo of those brazen throats,
By which he speaks the language of his heart,
And sigh, but never tremble at the sound.
He travels and expatiates, as the bee
From flower to flower, so he from land to land;
The manners, customs, policy, of all
Pay contribution to the store he gleans;
He sucks intelligence in every clime,
And spreads the honey of his deep research
At his return, a rich repast for me.
He travels, and I too. I tread his deck,
Ascend his topmast, through his peering eyes
Discover countries, with a kindred heart
Suffer his woes, and share in his escapes;
While fancy, like the finger of a clock,
Runs the great circuit, and is still at home.[2]

O Winter! ruler of the inverted year,
Thy scatter'd hair with sleet like ashes fill'd,
Thy breath congeal'd upon thy lips, thy cheeks
Fringed with a beard made white with other snows
Than those of age; thy forehead wrapp'd in clouds,
A leafless branch thy sceptre, and thy throne
A sliding car, indebted to no wheels,
But urged by storms along its slippery way:
I love thee, all unlovely as thou seem'st,
And dreaded as thou art. Thou hold'st the sun
A prisoner in the yet undawning east,
Shortening his journey between morn and noon,
And hurrying him, impatient of his stay,
Down to the rosy west; but kindly still
Compensating his loss with added hours
Of social converse and instructive ease,
And gathering, at short notice, in one group
The family dispersed, and fixing thought,
Not less dispersed by daylight and its cares.
I crown thee king of intimate delights,

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Fireside enjoyments, homeborn happiness,
And all the comforts that the lowly roof
Of undisturb'd retirement, and the hours
Of long uninterrupted evening, know.
No rattling wheels stop short before these gates;
No powder'd pert, proficient in the art
Of sounding an alarm, assaults these doors
Till the street rings; no stationary steeds
Cough their own knell, while, heedless of the sound,
The silent circle fan themselves, and quake:
But here the needle plies its busy task,
The pattern grows, the well depicted flower,
Wrought patiently into the snowy lawn,
Unfolds its bosom; buds, and leaves, and sprigs,
And curling tendrils, gracefully disposed,
Follow the nimble finger of the fair;
A wreath, that cannot fade, of flowers that blow
With most success when all besides decay.
The poet's or historian's page by one
Made vocal for the amusement of the rest;
The sprightly lyre, whose treasure of sweet sounds
The touch from many a trembling chord shakes out;
And the clear voice symphonious, yet distinct,
And in the charming strife triumphant still,
Beguile the night, and set a keener edge
On female industry: the threaded steel
Flies swiftly, and unfelt the task proceeds.
The volume closed, the customary rites
Of the last meal commence. A Roman meal;
Such as the mistress of the world once found
Delicious, when her patriots of high note,
Perhaps, by moonlight, at their humble doors,
And under an old oak's domestic shade,
Enjoy'd, spare feast! a radish and an egg.
Discourse ensues, not trivial, yet not dull,
Nor such as with a frown forbids the play
Of fancy, or proscribes the sound of mirth:
Nor do we madly, like an impious world,
Who deem religion frenzy, and the God
That made them an intruder on their joys,
Start at his awful name, or deem his praise

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A jarring note. Themes of a graver tone,
Exciting oft our gratitude and love,
While we retrace with memory's pointing wand,
That calls the past to our exact review,
The dangers we have 'scaped, the broken snare,
The disappointed foe, deliverance found
Unlook'd for, life preserved, and peace restored,
Fruits of omnipotent eternal love.
O evenings worthy of the gods! exclaim'd
The Sabine bard.* O evenings, I reply,
More to be prized and coveted than yours,
As more illumined, and with nobler truths,
That I, and mine, and those we love, enjoy.[3]
Is winter hideous in a garb like this?
Needs he the tragic fur, the smoke of lamps,
The pent-up breath of an unsavoury throng,
To thaw him into feeling, or the smart
And snappish dialogue, that flippant wits
Call Comedy, to prompt him with a smile?
The self-complacent actor, when he views
(Stealing a sidelong glance at a full house)
The slope of faces from the floor to the roof
(As if one master-spring controll'd them all)
Relax'd into a universal grin,
Sees not a countenance there that speaks of joy
Half so refined or so sincere as ours.
Cards were superfluous here, with all the tricks
That idleness has ever yet contrived
To fill the void of an unfurnish'd brain,
To palliate dulness, and give time a shove.
Time, as he passes us, has a dove's wing,
Unsoil'd, and swift, and of a silken sound;
But the world's time is time in masquerade.
Theirs, should I paint him, has his pinions fledged
With motley plumes; and, where the peacock shews
His azure eyes, is tinctured black and red
With spots quadrangular of diamond form,
Ensanguined hearts, clubs typical of strife,
And spades, the emblem of untimely graves.

* Horace.

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What should be, and what was an hour-glass once,
Becomes a dice-box, and a billiard-mace
Well does the work of his destructive scythe.
Thus deck'd, he charms a world whom fashion blinds
To his true worth, most pleased when idle most;
Whose only happy are their wasted hours.
Even misses, at whose age their mothers wore
The backstring and the bib, assume the dress
Of womanhood, sit pupils in the school
Of card-devoted time, and night by night
Placed at some vacant corner of the board,
Learn every trick, and soon play all the game.
But truce with censure. Roving as I rove,
Where shall I find an end, or how proceed?
As he that travels far oft turns aside,
To view some rugged rock or mouldering tower,
Which seen delights him not; then coming home
Describes and prints it, that the world may know
How far he went for what was nothing worth:
So I, with brush in hand, and palette spread,
With colours mix'd for a far different use,
Paint cards, and dolls, and every idle thing
That fancy finds in her excursive flights.

Come, Evening, once again, season of peace;
Return, sweet Evening, and continue long!
Methinks I see thee in the streaky west,
With matron step slow moving, while the night
Treads on thy sweeping train; one hand employ'd
In letting fall the curtain of repose
On bird and beast, the other charged for man
With sweet oblivion of the cares of day:
Not sumptuously adorn'd, nor needing aid,
Like homely-featured Night, of clustering gems;
A star or two, just twinkling on thy brow,
Suffices thee; save that the moon is thine
No less than hers, not worn indeed on high
With ostentatious pageantry, but set
With modest grandeur in thy purple zone,
Resplendent less, but of an ampler round.
Come then, and thou shalt find thy votary calm,
Or make me so.[4] Composure is thy gift;

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And, whether I devote thy gentle hours
To books, to music, or the poet's toil;
To weaving nets for bird-alluring fruit,
Or twining silken threads round ivory reels,
When they command whom man was born to please,
I slight thee not, but make thee welcome still.
  Just when our drawing-rooms begin to blaze
With lights, by clear reflection multiplied
From many a mirror, in which he of Gath,
Goliath, might have seen his giant bulk
Whole without stooping, towering crest and all,
My pleasures too begin. But me perhaps
The glowing hearth may satisfy a while
With faint illumination, that uplifts
The shadows to the ceiling, there by fits
Dancing uncouthly to the quivering flame.
Not undelightful is an hour to me
So spent in parlour twilight. Such a gloom
Suits well the thoughtful or unthinking mind,
The mind contemplative, with some new theme
Pregnant, or indisposed alike to all.
Laugh ye, who boast your more mercurial powers,
That never feel a stupor, know no pause,
Nor need one; I am conscious, and confess
Fearless, a soul that does not always think.
Me oft has fancy, ludicrous and wild,
Soothed with a waking dream of houses, towers,
Trees, churches, and strange visages, express'd
In the red cinders, while with poring eye
I gazed, myself creating what I saw.
Nor less amused have I quiescent watch'd
The sooty films that play upon the bars
Pendulous, and foreboding in the view
Of superstition, prophesying still,
Though still deceived, some stranger's near approach.
'Tis thus the understanding takes repose
In indolent vacuity of thought,
And sleeps, and is refresh'd. Meanwhile the face
Conceals the mood lethargic with a mask
Of deep deliberation, as the man
Were task'd to his full strength, absorb'd and lost.

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Thus oft, reclined at ease, I lose an hour
At evening, till at length the freezing blast,
That sweeps the bolted shutter, summons home
The recollected powers; and snapping short
The glassy threads, with which the fancy weaves
Her brittle toils, restores me to myself.
How calm is my recess; and how the frost,
Raging abroad, and the rough wind, endear
The silence and the warmth enjoy'd within!
I saw the woods and fields at close of day
A variegated show; the meadows green,
Though faded; and the lands, where lately waved
The golden harvest, of a mellow brown,
Upturn'd so lately by the forceful share.
I saw far off the weedy fallows smile
With verdure not unprofitable, grazed
By flocks, fast feeding, and selecting each
His favourite herb; while all the leafless groves
That skirt the horizon, wore a sable hue,
Scarce noticed in the kindred dusk of eve.
To-morrow brings a change, a total change!
Which even now, though silently perform'd,
And slowly, and by most unfelt, the face
Of universal nature undergoes.
Fast falls a fleecy shower: the downy flakes
Descending, and, with never-ceasing lapse,
Softly alighting upon all below,
Assimilate all objects. Earth receives
Gladly the thickening mantle; and the green
And tender blade, that fear'd the chilling blast,
Escapes unhurt beneath so warm a veil.
In such a world, so thorny, and where none
Finds happiness unblighted, or, if found,
Without some thistly sorrow at its side,
It seems the part of wisdom, and no sin
Against the law of love, to measure lots
With less distinguish'd than ourselves, that thus
We may with patience bear our moderate ills,
And sympathize with others suffering more.
Ill fares the traveller now, and he that stalks
In ponderous boots beside his reeking team.

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The wain goes heavily, impeded sore
By congregated loads adhering close
To the clogg'd wheels; and in its sluggish pace
Noiseless appears a moving hill of snow.
The toiling steeds expand the nostril wide,
While every breath, by respiration strong
Forced downward, is consolidated soon
Upon their jutting chests. He, form'd to bear
The pelting brunt of the tempestuous night,
With half-shut eyes, and pucker'd cheeks, and teeth
Presented bare against the storm, plods on.
One hand secures his hat, save when with both
He brandishes his pliant length of whip,
Resounding oft, and never heard in vain.
Oh happy, and in my account, denied
The sensibility of pain with which
Refinement is endued, thrice happy thou!
Thy frame, robust and hardy, feels indeed
The piercing cold, but feels it unimpair'd.
The learned finger never need explore
Thy vigorous pulse; and the unhealthful east,
That breathes the spleen, and searches every bone
Of the infirm, is wholesome air to thee.
Thy days roll on exempt from household care;
Thy wagon is thy wife; and the poor beasts,
That drag the dull companion to and fro,
Thine helpless charge, dependent on thy care.
Ah, treat them kindly! rude as thou appear'st,
Yet shew that thou hast mercy! which the great,
With needless hurry whirl'd from place to place,
Humane as they would seem, not always shew.
  Poor, yet industrious, modest, quiet, neat,
Such claim compassion in a night like this,
And have a friend in every feeling heart.
Warm'd, while it lasts, by labour, all day long
They brave the season, and yet find at eve,
Ill clad and fed but sparely, time to cool.
The frugal housewife trembles when she lights
Her scanty stock of brushwood, blazing clear,
But dying soon, like all terrestrial joys.

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The few small embers left she nurses well;
And, while her infant race, with outspread hands,
And crowded knees sit cowering o'er the sparks,
Retires, content to quake, so they be warm'd.
The man feels least, as more inured than she
To winter, and the current in his veins
More briskly moved by his severer toil;
Yet he too finds his own distress in theirs.
The taper soon extinguish'd, which I saw
Dangled along at the cold finger's end
Just when the day declined; and the brown loaf
Lodged on the shelf, half-eaten, without sauce
Of savoury cheese, or butter, costlier still;
Sleep seems their only refuge: for, alas,
Where penury is felt the thought is chain'd,
And sweet colloquial pleasures are but few.
With all this thrift they thrive not. All the care
Ingenious parsimony takes, but just
Saves the small inventory, bed, and stool,
Skillet and old carved chest, from public sale.
They live, and live without extorted alms
From grudging hands; but other boast have none,
To soothe their honest pride, that scorns to beg,
Nor comfort else, but in their mutual love.
I praise you much, ye meek and patient pair,
For ye are worthy; choosing rather far
A dry but independent crust, hard earn'd,
And eaten with a sigh, than to endure
The rugged frowns and insolent rebuffs
Of knaves in office, partial in the work
Of distribution; liberal of their aid
To clamorous importunity in rags,
But ofttimes deaf to suppliants, who would blush
To wear a tatter'd garb however coarse,
Whom famine cannot reconcile to filth;
These ask with painful shyness, and, refused
Because deserving, silently retire!
But be ye of good courage! Time itself
Shall much befriend you. Time shall give increase;
And all your numerous progeny, well-train'd
But helpless, in few years shall find their hands,

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And labour too. Meanwhile ye shall not want
What, conscious of your virtues, we can spare,
Nor what a wealthier than ourselves may send.
I mean the man, who, when the distant poor
Need help, denies them nothing but his name.*
But poverty with most, who whimper forth
Their long complaints, is self-inflicted wo;
The effect of laziness or sottish waste.
Now goes the nightly thief prowling abroad
For plunder; much solicitous how best
He may compensate for a day of sloth
By works of darkness and nocturnal wrong.
Wo to the gardener's pale, the farmer's hedge,
Plash'd neatly, and secured with driven stakes
Deep in the loamy bank. Uptorn by strength,
Resistless in so bad a cause, but lame
To better deeds, he bundles up the spoil,
An ass's burden, and when laden most
And heaviest, light of foot steals fast away.
Nor does the boarded hovel better guard
The well stack'd pile of riven logs and roots
From his pernicious force. Nor will he leave
Unwrench'd the door, however well secured,
Where Chanticleer amidst his haram sleeps
In unsuspecting pomp. 'Twitch'd from the perch,
He gives the princely bird, with all his wives,
To his voracious bag, struggling in vain
And loudly wondering at the sudden change.
Nor this to feed his own. 'Twere some excuse
Did pity of their sufferings warp aside
His principle, and tempt him into sin
For their support, so destitute. But they
Neglected pine at home; themselves, as more
Exposed than others, with less scruple made
His victims, robb'd of their defenceless all.
Cruel is all he does. 'Tis quenchless thirst
Of ruinous ebriety that prompts
His every action, and imbrutes the man.
Oh, for a law to noose the villain's neck,
Who starves his own, who persecutes the blood

* Mr Thornton. See *Life*.

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He gave them in his children's veins, and hates
And wrongs the woman he has sworn to love.
  Pass where we may, through city or through town,
Village, or hamlet, of this merry land,
Though lean and beggar'd, every twentieth pace
Conducts the unguarded nose to such a whiff
Of stale debauch, forth issuing from the styes
That law has licensed, as makes temperance reel.
There sit, involved and lost in curling clouds
Of Indian fume, and guzzling deep, the boor,
The lackey, and the groom: the craftsman there
Takes a Lethean leave of all his toil:
Smith, cobbler, joiner, he that plies the shears,
And he that kneads the dough — all loud alike,
All learned, and all drunk! The fiddle screams
Plaintive and piteous, as it wept and wail'd
Its wasted tones and harmony unheard;
Fierce the dispute, whate'er the theme; while she,
Fell Discord, arbitress of such debate,
Perch'd on the signpost, holds with even hand
Her undecisive scales. In this she lays
A weight of ignorance; in that, of pride;
And smiles delighted with the eternal poise.
Dire is the frequent curse, and its twin sound,
The cheek-distending oath, not to be praised
As ornamental, musical, polite,
Like those which modern senators employ,
Whose oath is rhetoric, and who swear for fame!
Behold the schools in which plebeian minds,
Once simple, are initiated in arts,
Which some may practise with politer grace,
But none with readier skill! — 'tis here they learn
The road that leads from competence and peace
To indigence and rapine; till at last
Society, grown weary of the load,
Shakes her encumber'd lap, and casts them out.
But censure profits little; vain the attempt
To advertise in verse a public pest,
That, like the filth with which the peasant feeds
His hungry acres, stinks, and is of use.
The excise is fatten'd with the rich result

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Of all this riot; and ten thousand casks,
For ever dribbling out their base contents,
Touch'd by the Midas finger of the state,
Bleed gold for ministers to sport away.
Drink, and be mad then; 'tis your country bids;
Gloriously drunk, obey the important call!
Her cause demands the assistance of your throats, —
Ye all can swallow, and she asks no more.
Would I had fallen upon those happier days
That poets celebrate; those golden times,
And those Arcadian scenes, that Maro sings,
And Sidney, warbler of poetic prose.
Nymphs were Dianas then, and swains had hearts
That felt their virtues: innocence, it seems,
From courts dismiss'd, found shelter in the groves;
The footsteps of simplicity, impress'd
Upon the yielding herbage, (so they sing,)
Then were not all effaced: then speech profane
And manners profligate were rarely found,
Observed as prodigies, and soon reclaim'd.
Vain wish! those days were never: airy dreams
Sat for the picture; and the poet's hand,
Imparting substance to an empty shade,
Imposed a gay delirium for a truth.
Grant it: I still must envy them an age
That favour'd such a dream; in days like these
Impossible, when virtue is so scarce,
That to suppose a scene where she presides,
Is tramontane, and stumbles all belief.
No: we are polish'd now: The rural lass,
Whom once her virgin modesty and grace,
Her artless manners and her neat attire,
So dignified, that she was hardly less
Than the fair shepherdess of old romance,
Is seen no more: the character is lost!
Her head, adorn'd with lappets pinn'd aloft,
And ribands streaming gay, superbly raised,
And magnified beyond all human size,
Indebted to some smart wig-weaver's hand
For more than half the tresses it sustains;
Her elbows ruffled, and her tottering form

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Ill-propp'd upon French heels; she might be deem'd
(But that the basket dangling on her arm
Interprets her more truly) of a rank
Too proud for dairy-work or sale of eggs.
Expect her soon with foot-boy at her heels,
No longer blushing for her awkward load,
Her train and her umbrella all her care.
  The town has tinged the country; and the stain
Appears a spot upon a vestal's robe,
The worse for what it soils. The fashion runs
Down into scenes still rural, but, alas!
Scenes rarely graced with rural manners now.
Time was when in the pastoral retreat
The unguarded door was safe; men did not watch
To invade another's right, or guard their own.
Then sleep was undisturb'd by fear, unscared
By drunken howlings; and the chilling tale
Of midnight murder was a wonder heard
With doubtful credit, told to frighten babes.
But farewell now to unsuspicious nights,
And slumbers unalarm'd: Now, ere you sleep,
See that your polish'd arms be primed with care,
And drop the night-bolt; ruffians are abroad,
And the first larum of the cock's shrill throat
May prove a trumpet, summoning your ear
To horrid sounds of hostile feet within.
Even daylight has its dangers; and the walk
Through pathless wastes and woods, unconscious once
Of other tenants than melodious birds,
Or harmless flocks, is hazardous and bold.
Lamented change! to which full many a cause
Inveterate, hopeless of a cure, conspires.
The course of human things from good to ill,
From ill to worse, is fatal, never fails.
Increase of power begets increase of wealth;
Wealth luxury, and luxury excess;
Excess the scrofulous and itchy plague,
That seizes first the opulent, descends
To the next rank contagious, and in time
Taints downward all the graduated scale
Of order, from the chariot to the plough.

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The rich, and they that have an arm to check
The licence of the lowest in degree,
Desert their office; and themselves, intent
On pleasure, haunt the capital, and thus
To all the violence of lawless hands
Resign the scenes their presence might protect.
Authority herself not seldom sleeps,
Though resident, and witness of the wrong.
The plump convivial parson often bears
The magisterial sword in vain, and lays
His reverence and his worship both to rest
On the same cushion of habitual sloth.
Perhaps timidity restrains his arm;
When he should strike he trembles, and sets free,
Himself enslaved by terror of the band,
The audacious convict whom he dares not bind.
Perhaps, though by profession ghostly pure,
He too may have his vice, and sometimes prove
Less dainty than becomes his grave outside
In lucrative concerns. Examine well
His milkwhite hand; the palm is hardly clean—
But here and there an ugly smutch appears.
Foh! 'twas a bribe that left it: he has touch'd
Corruption. Whoso seeks an audit here
Propitious, pays his tribute, game or fish,
Wild fowl or venison, and his errand speeds.
  But faster far, and more than all the rest,
A noble cause, which none who bears a spark
Of public virtue ever wish'd removed,
Works the deplored and mischievous effect.
'Tis universal soldiership has stabb'd
The heart of merit in the meaner class.
Arms, through the vanity and brainless rage
Of those that bear them, in whatever cause,
Seem most at variance with all moral good,
And incompatible with serious thought.
The clown, the child of nature, without guile,
Blest with an infant's ignorance of all
But his own simple pleasures, now and then
A wrestling match, a footrace, or a fair,
Is balloted, and trembles at the news;

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Sheepish he doffs his hat, and mumbling swears
A Bible oath to be whate'er they please,
To do he knows not what. The task perform'd,
That instant he becomes the sergeant's care,
His pupil, and his torment, and his jest.
His awkward gait, his introverted toes,
Bent knees, round shoulders, and dejected looks,
Procure him many a curse. By slow degrees,
Unapt to learn, and form'd of stubborn stuff,
He yet by slow degrees puts off himself,
Grows conscious of a change, and likes it well:
He stands erect; his slouch becomes a walk;
He steps right onward, martial in his air,
His form, and movement; is as smart above
As meal and larded locks can make him; wears
His hat, or his plumed helmet, with a grace;
And, his three years of heroship expired,
Returns indignant to the slighted plough.
He hates the field, in which no fife or drum
Attends him; drives his cattle to a march;
And sighs for the smart comrades he has left.
'Twere well if his exterior change were all—
But with his clumsy port the wretch has lost
His ignorance and harmless manners too.
To swear, to game, to drink; to shew at home
By lewdness, idleness, and Sabbath-breach,
The great proficiency he made abroad;
To astonish and to grieve his gazing friends,
To break some maiden's and his mother's heart;
To be a pest where he was useful once;
Are his sole aim and all his glory now.
  Man in society is like a flower
Blown in its native bed: 'tis there alone
His faculties, expanded in full bloom,
Shine out; there only reach their proper use.
But man, associated and leagued with man
By regal warrant, or self-join'd by bond
For interest sake, or swarming into clans
Beneath one head, for purposes of war,
Like flowers selected from the rest, and bound
And bundled close to fill some crowded vase,

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Fades rapidly, and, by compression marr'd,
Contracts defilement not to be endured.
Hence charter'd burghs are such public plagues;
And burghers, men immaculate perhaps
In all their private functions, once combined,
Become a loathsome body, only fit
For dissolution, hurtful to the main.
Hence merchants, unimpeachable of sin
Against the charities of domestic life,
Incorporated, seem at once to lose
Their nature; and, disclaiming all regard
For mercy and the common rights of man,
Build factories with blood, conducting trade
At the sword's point, and dyeing the white robe
Of innocent commercial justice red.
Hence, too, the field of glory, as the world
Misdeems it, dazzled by its bright array,
With all its majesty of thundering pomp,
Enchanting music and immortal wreaths,
Is but a school, where thoughtlessness is taught
On principle, where foppery atones
For folly, gallantry for every vice.
  But, slighted as it is, and by the great
Abandon'd, and, which still I more regret,
Infected with the manners and the modes
It knew not once, the country wins me still.
I never framed a wish, or form'd a plan,
That flatter'd me with hopes of earthly bliss,
But there I laid the scene. There early stray'd
My fancy, ere yet liberty of choice
Had found me, or the hope of being free.
My very dreams were rural; rural too
The first-born efforts of my youthful muse,
Sportive and jingling her poetic bells,
Ere yet her ear was mistress of their powers.[5]
No bard could please me, but whose lyre was tuned
To Nature's praises. Heroes and their feats
Fatigued me, never weary of the pipe
Of Tityrus, assembling, as he sang,
The rustic throng beneath his favourite beech.
Then Milton had indeed a poet's charms:

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New to my taste, his Paradise surpass'd
The struggling efforts of my boyish tongue
To speak its excellence. I danced for joy.
I marvell'd much, that at so ripe an age
As twice seven years, his beauties had then first
Engaged my wonder; and admiring still,
And still admiring, with regret supposed
The joy half lost, because not sooner found.
Thee, too, enamour'd of the life I loved,
Pathetic in its praise, in its pursuit
Determined, and possessing it at last
With transports, such as favour'd lovers feel,
I studied, prized, and wish'd that I had known
Ingenious Cowley! and, though now reclaim'd
By modern lights from an erroneous taste,
I cannot but lament thy splendid wit
Entangled in the cobwebs of the schools.
I still revere thee, courtly though retired;
Though stretch'd at ease in Chertsey's silent bowers,
Not unemploy'd; and finding rich amends
For a lost world in solitude and verse.
'Tis born with all; the love of Nature's works
Is an ingredient in the compound man
Infused at the creation of the kind.
And, though the Almighty Maker has throughout
Discriminated each from each, by strokes
And touches of his hand, with so much art
Diversified, that two were never found
Twins at all points—yet this obtains in all,
That all discern a beauty in His works,
And all can taste them: minds, that have been form'd
And tutor'd, with a relish more exact,
But none without some relish, none unmoved.
It is a flame, that dies not even there,
Where nothing feeds it: neither business, crowds,
Nor habits of luxurious city life,
Whatever else they smother of true worth
In human bosoms, quench it, or abate.
The villas with which London stands begirt,
Like a swarth Indian, with his belt of beads,
Prove it. A breath of unadulterate air,

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The glimpse of a green pasture, how they cheer
The citizen, and brace his languid frame!
Even in the stifling bosom of the town
A garden, in which nothing thrives, has charms
That soothe the rich possessor; much consoled,
That here and there some sprigs of mournful mint,
Of nightshade, or valerian, grace the well
He cultivates. These serve him with a hint
That Nature lives; that sight-refreshing green
Is still the livery she delights to wear,
Though sickly samples of the exuberant whole.
What are the casements lined with creeping herbs,
The prouder sashes fronted with a range
Of orange, myrtle, or the fragrant weed,
The Frenchman's* darling? are they not all proofs
That man, immured in cities, still retains
His inborn inextinguishable thirst
Of rural scenes, compensating his loss
By supplemental shifts, the best he may?
The most unfurnish'd with the means of life,
And they that never pass their brickwall bounds
To range the fields and treat their lungs with air,
Yet feel the burning instinct: over head
Suspend their crazy boxes, planted thick
And water'd duly. There the pitcher stands
A fragment, and the spoutless tea-pot there;
Sad witnesses how close-pent man regrets
The country, with what ardour he contrives
A peep at Nature, when he can no more.
  Hail, therefore, patroness of health and ease,
And contemplation, heart consoling joys,
And harmless pleasures, in the throng'd abode
Of multitudes unknown; hail, rural life!
Address himself who will to the pursuit
Of honours, or emolument, or fame,
I shall not add myself to such a chase,
Thwart his attempts, or envy his success.
Some must be great: great offices will have
Great talents: and God gives to every man

* Mignonnette.—*Author.*

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The virtue, temper, understanding, taste,
That lifts him into life, and lets him fall
Just in the niche he was ordain'd to fill.
To the deliverer of an injured land
He gives a tongue to enlarge upon, a heart
To feel, and courage to redress her wrongs;
To monarchs dignity; to judges sense;
To artists ingenuity and skill;
To me, an unambitious mind, content
In the low vale of life, that early felt
A wish for ease and leisure, and ere long
Found here that leisure and that ease I wish'd.

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THE TASK.

BOOK V.

THE WINTER MORNING WALK.

ARGUMENT OF THE FIFTH BOOK.

A frosty morning. — The foddering of cattle. — The woodman and his dog. — The poultry. — Whimsical effects of frost at a waterfall. — The Empress of Russia's palace of ice. — Amusements of monarchs. — War one of them. — Wars, whence. — And whence monarchy. — The evils of it. — English and French loyalty contrasted. — The Bastile, and a prisoner there. — Liberty the chief recommendation of this country. — Modern patriotism questionable, and why. — The perishable nature of the best human institutions. — Spiritual liberty not perishable. — The slavish state of man by nature. — Deliver him, Deist, if you can. — Grace must do it. — The respective merits of patriots and martyrs stated. — Their different treatment. — Happy freedom of the man whom grace makes free. — His relish of the works of God. — Address to the Creator.

'Tis morning; and the sun, with ruddy orb
Ascending, fires the horizon; while the clouds,
That crowd away before the driving wind,
More ardent as the disk emerges more,
Resemble most some city in a blaze,
Seen through the leafless wood. His slanting ray
Slides ineffectual down the snowy vale,
And, tinging all with his own rosy hue,
From every herb and every spiry blade
Stretches a length of shadow o'er the field.
Mine, spindling into longitude immense,
In spite of gravity, and sage remark
That I myself am but a fleeting shade,
Provokes me to a smile. With eye askance
I view the muscular proportion'd limb
Transform'd to a lean shank. The shapeless pair,
As they design'd to mock me, at my side

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Take step for step; and, as I near approach
The cottage, walk along the plaster'd wall,
Preposterous sight! the legs without the man.
The verdure of the plain lies buried deep
Beneath the dazzling deluge; and the bents,
And coarser grass, upspearing o'er the rest,
Of late unsightly and unseen, now shine
Conspicuous, and in bright apparel clad,
And fledged with icy feathers, nod superb.
The cattle mourn in corners, where the fence
Screens them, and seem, half petrified, to sleep
In unrecumbent sadness. There they wait
Their wonted fodder; not like hungering man,
Fretful if unsupplied; but silent, meek,
And patient of the slow-paced swain's delay.
He from the stack carves out the accustom'd load,
Deep-plunging, and again deep-plunging oft
His broad keen knife into the solid mass:
Smooth as a wall the upright remnant stands,
With such undeviating and even force
He severs it away: no needless care,
Lest storms should overset the leaning pile
Deciduous, or its own unbalanced weight.

Forth goes the woodman, leaving unconcern'd
The cheerful haunts of man, to wield the axe,
And drive the wedge, in yonder forest drear,
From morn to eve his solitary task.
Shaggy and lean, and shrewd, with pointed ears,
And tail cropp'd short, half lurcher and half cur,
His dog attends him. Close behind his heel
Now creeps he slow; and now, with many a frisk
Wide-scampering, snatches up the drifted snow
With ivory teeth, or ploughs it with his snout;
Then shakes his powder'd coat, and barks for joy.
Heedless of all his pranks, the sturdy churl
Moves right toward the mark; nor stops for aught,
But now and then with pressure of his thumb
To adjust the fragrant charge of a short tube,
That fumes beneath his nose: the trailing cloud
Streams far behind him, scenting all the air.

Now from the roost, or from the neighbouring pale,

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Where, diligent to catch the first faint gleam
Of smiling day, they gossip'd side by side,
Come trooping at the housewife's well known call
The feather'd tribes domestic. Half on wing,
And half on foot, they brush the fleecy flood,
Conscious and fearful of too deep a plunge.
The sparrows peep, and quit the sheltering eaves,
To seize the fair occasion. Well they eye
The scatter'd grain, and thievishly resolved
To escape the impending famine, often scared
As oft return, a pert voracious kind.
Clean riddance quickly made, one only care
Remains to each, the search of sunny nook,
Or shed impervious to the blast. Resign'd
To sad necessity, the cock foregoes
His wonted strut; and, wading at their head
With well-consider'd steps, seems to resent
His alter'd gait and stateliness retrench'd.
How find the myriads, that in summer cheer
The hills and valleys with their ceaseless songs,
Due sustenance, or where subsist they now?
Earth yields them nought; the imprison'd worm is safe
Beneath the frozen clod; all seeds of herbs
Lie cover'd close; and berry-bearing thorns
That feed the thrush (whatever some suppose,)
Afford the smaller minstrels no supply.
The long protracted rigour of the year
Thins all their numerous flocks. In chinks and holes
Ten thousand seek an unmolested end,
As instinct prompts; self-buried ere they die.
The very rooks and daws forsake the fields,
Where neither grub, nor root, nor earth-nut, now
Repays their labour more; and perch'd aloft
By the wayside, or stalking in the path,
Lean pensioners upon the traveller's track,
Pick up their nauseous dole, though sweet to them,
Of voided pulse or half-digested grain.
  The streams are lost amid the splendid blank,
O'erwhelming all distinction. On the flood,
Indurated and fix'd, the snowy weight
Lies undissolved; while silently beneath,

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And unperceived, the current steals away.
Not so where, scornful of a check, it leaps
The milldam, dashes on the restless wheel,
And wantons in the pebbly gulf below:
No frost can bind it there; its utmost force
Can but arrest the light and smoky mist,
That in its fall the liquid sheet throws wide.
And see where it has hung the embroider'd banks
With forms so various, that no powers of art,
The pencil or the pen, may trace the scene!
Here glittering turrets rise, upbearing high
(Fantastic misarrangement!) on the roof
Large growth of what may seem the sparkling trees
And shrubs of fairy land. The crystal drops,
That trickle down the branches, fast congeal'd,
Shoot into pillars of pellucid length,
And prop the pile they but adorn'd before.
Here grotto within grotto safe defies
The sunbeam; there, emboss'd and fretted wild,
The growing wonder takes a thousand shapes
Capricious, in which fancy seeks in vain
The likeness of some object seen before.
Thus Nature works as if to mock at Art,
And in defiance of her rival powers;
By these fortuitous and random strokes
Performing such inimitable feats,
As she with all her rules can never reach.
Less worthy of applause, though more admired,
Because a novelty, the work of man,
Imperial mistress of the fur-clad Russ!
Thy most magnificent and mighty freak,
The wonder of the North. No forest fell,
When thou wouldst build; no quarry sent its stores
To enrich thy walls: but thou didst hew the floods,
And make thy marble of the glassy wave.
In such a palace Aristæus found
Cyrene, when he bore the plaintive tale
Of his lost bees to her maternal ear:*
In such a palace poetry might place

* See VIRGIL, Georg. iv. sub. fin.

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The armory of winter; where his troops,
The gloomy clouds, find weapons, arrowy sleet,
Skin-piercing volley, blossom-bruising hail,
And snow, that often blinds the traveller's course,
And wraps him in an unexpected tomb.
Silently as a dream the fabric rose;*
No sound of hammer or of saw was there.
Ice upon ice, the well-adjusted parts
Were soon conjoin'd, nor other cement ask'd
Than water interfused to make them one.
Lamps gracefully disposed, and of all hues,
Illumined every side: a watery light
Gleam'd through the clear transparency, that seem'd
Another moon new risen, or meteor fallen
From heaven to earth, of lambent flame serene.
So stood the brittle prodigy; though smooth
And slippery the materials, yet frostbound
Firm as a rock. Nor wanted aught within,
That royal residence might well befit,
For grandeur or for use. Long wavy wreaths
Of flowers, that fear'd no enemy but warmth,
Blush'd on the panels. Mirror needed none
Where all was vitreous; but in order due
Convivial table and commodious seat
(What seem'd at least commodious seat) were there;
Sofa, and couch, and high-built throne august.
The same lubricity was found in all,
And all was moist to the warm touch; a scene
Of evanescent glory, once a stream,
And soon to slide into a stream again.
Alas! 'twas but a mortifying stroke
Of undesign'd severity, that glanced
(Made by a monarch) on her own estate,
On human grandeur and the courts of kings.
'Twas transient in its nature, as in show
'Twas durable; as worthless as it seem'd
Intrinsically precious; to the foot
Treacherous and false; it smiled, and it was cold.
Great princes have great playthings. Some have play'd

* ——— A fabric huge
Rose like an exhalation.—MILTON.

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At hewing mountains into men, and some
At building human wonders mountain-high.
Some have amused the dull, sad years of life,
(Life spent in indolence, and therefore sad,)
With schemes of monumental fame; and sought
By pyramids and mausolean pomp,
Shortlived themselves, to immortalize their bones.
Some seek diversion in the tented field,
And make the sorrows of mankind their sport.
But war's a game, which, were their subjects wise,
Kings would not play at. Nations would do well
To extort their truncheons from the puny hands
Of heroes, whose infirm and baby minds
Are gratified with mischief; and who spoil,
Because men suffer it, their toy — the world.
When Babel was confounded, and the great
Confederacy of projectors, wild and vain,
Was split into diversity of tongues,
Then, as a shepherd separates his flock,
These to the upland, to the valley those,
God drave asunder, and assign'd their lot
To all the nations. Ample was the boon
He gave them, in its distribution fair
And equal; and he bade them dwell in peace.
Peace was a while their care: they plough'd and sow'd,
And reap'd their plenty without grudge or strife.
But violence can never longer sleep
Than human passions please. In every heart
Are sown the sparks that kindle fiery war;
Occasion needs but fan them, and they blaze.
Cain had already shed a brother's blood:
The Deluge wash'd it out; but left unquench'd
The seeds of murder in the breast of man.
Soon by a righteous judgment in the line
Of his descending progeny was found
The first artificer of death; the shrewd
Contriver who first sweated at the forge,
And forced the blunt and yet unblooded steel
To a keen edge, and made it bright for war.
Him, Tubal named, the Vulcan of old times,
The sword and falchion their inventor claim,

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And the first smith was the first murderer's son.
His art survived the waters; and ere long,
When man was multiplied and spread abroad
In tribes and clans, and had begun to call
These meadows and that range of hills his own,
The tasted sweets of property begat
Desire of more, and industry in some,
To improve and cultivate their just demesne,
Made others covet what they saw so fair.
Thus war began on earth: these fought for spoil,
And those in self-defence. Savage at first
The onset, and irregular. At length
One eminent above the rest for strength,
For stratagem, for courage, or for all,
Was chosen leader; him they served in war,
And him in peace, for sake of warlike deeds
Reverenced no less. Who could with him compare?
Or who so worthy to control themselves,
As he, whose prowess had subdued their foes?
Thus war, affording field for the display
Of virtue, made one chief, whom times of peace,
Which have their exigencies too, and call
For skill in government, at length made king.
King was a name too proud for man to wear
With modesty and meekness; and the crown,
So dazzling in their eyes who set it on,
Was sure to intoxicate the brows it bound.
It is the abject property of most,
That, being parcel of the common mass,
And destitute of means to raise themselves,
They sink, and settle lower than they need.
They know not what it is to feel within
A comprehensive faculty, that grasps
Great purposes with ease, that turns and wields,
Almost without an effort, plans too vast
For their conception, which they cannot move.
Conscious of impotence they soon grow drunk
With gazing, when they see an able man
Step forth to notice: and, besotted thus,
Build him a pedestal, and say,—"Stand there,
And be our admiration and our praise."

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They roll themselves before him in the dust,
Then most deserving in their own account
When most extravagant in his applause,
As if exalting him they raised themselves.
Thus by degrees, self-cheated of their sound
And sober judgment, that he is but man,
They demi-deify and fume him so,
That in due season he forgets it too.
Inflated and astrut with self-conceit,
He gulps the windy diet; and, ere long,
Adopting their mistake, profoundly thinks
The world was made in vain, if not for him.
Thenceforth they are his cattle: drudges, born
To bear his burdens, drawing in his gears,
And sweating in his service, his caprice
Becomes the soul that animates them all.
He deems a thousand, or ten thousand lives,
Spent in the purchase of renown for him,
An easy reckoning — and they think the same.
Thus kings were first invented, and thus kings
Were burnish'd into heroes, and became
The arbiters of this terraqueous swamp,
Storks among frogs, that have but croak'd and died.
Strange, that such folly as lifts bloated man
To eminence fit only for a god,
Should ever drivel out of human lips,
Even in the cradled weakness of the world!
Still stranger much, that when at length mankind
Had reach'd the sinewy firmness of their youth,
And could discriminate and argue well
On subjects more mysterious, they were yet
Babes in the cause of freedom, and should fear
And quake before the gods themselves had made.*
But above measure strange, that neither proof
Of sad experience, nor examples set
By some, whose patriot virtue has prevail'd,
Can even now, when they are grown mature

* See Lady M. W. Montague's Letters, last volume, for a description of the origin of society closely resembling that in the text. Cowper had lately read that work before writing these verses, so remarkable for their force and sarcasm.

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In wisdom, and with philosophic deeds
Familiar, serve to emancipate the rest!
Such dupes are men to custom, and so prone
To reverence what is ancient, and can plead
A course of long observance for its use,
That even servitude, the worst of ills,
Because deliver'd down from sire to son,
Is kept and guarded as a sacred thing.
But is it fit, or can it bear the shock
Of rational discussion, that a man,
Compounded and made up like other men
Of elements tumultuous, in whom lust
And folly in as ample measure meet,
As in the bosoms of the slaves he rules,
Should be a despot absolute, and boast
Himself the only freeman of his land?
Should, when he pleases, and on whom he will,
Wage war, with any or with no pretence
Of provocation given, or wrong sustain'd,
And force the beggarly last doit, by means
That his own humour dictates, from the clutch
Of poverty, that thus he may procure
His thousands, weary of penurious life,
A splendid opportunity to die?
Say ye, who (with less prudence than of old
Jotham ascribed to his assembled trees
In politic convention) put your trust
I' the shadow of a bramble, and reclined
In fancied peace beneath his dangerous branch,
Rejoice in him, and celebrate his sway,
Where find ye passive fortitude? Whence springs
Your self-denying zeal, that holds it good
To stroke the prickly grievance, and to hang
His thorns with streamers of continual praise?
We too are friends to loyalty. We love
The king who loves the law, respects his bounds,
And reigns content within them: him we serve
Freely and with delight, who leaves us free;
But recollecting still that he is man,
We trust him not too far. King though he be,

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And king in England too, he may be weak,
And vain enough to be ambitious still;
May exercise amiss his proper powers,
Or covet more than freemen choose to grant:
Beyond that mark is treason. He is ours,
To administer, to guard, to adorn the state,
But not to warp or change it. We are his,
To serve him nobly in the common cause,
True to the death, but not to be his slaves.
Mark now the difference, ye that boast your love
Of kings, between your loyalty and ours:
We love the man, the paltry pageant you;
We the chief patron of the commonwealth,
You the regardless author of its woes;
We, for the sake of liberty, a king,
You, chains and bondage, for a tyrant's sake.
Our love is principle, and has its root
In reason, is judicious, manly, free;
Yours, a blind instinct, crouches to the rod,
And licks the foot that treads it in the dust.
Were kingship as true treasure as it seems,
Sterling, and worthy of a wise man's wish,
I would not be a king to be beloved
Causeless, and daub'd with undiscerning praise,
Where love is mere attachment to the throne,
Not to the man who fills it as he ought.[1]
Whose freedom is by sufferance, and at will
Of a superior, he is never free.
Who lives, and is not weary of a life
Exposed to manacles, deserves them well.
The state that strives for liberty, though foil'd,
And forced to abandon what she bravely sought,
Deserves at least applause for her attempt,
And pity for her loss. But that's a cause
Not often unsuccessful: power usurp'd
Is weakness when opposed; conscious of wrong,
Tis pusillanimous and prone to flight.
But slaves, that once conceive the glowing thought
Of freedom, in that hope itself possess
All that the contest calls for; spirit, strength,

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The scorn of danger, and united hearts,
The surest presage of the good they seek.*
Then shame to manhood, and opprobrious more
To France than all her losses and defeats,
Old or of later date, by sea or land,
Her house of bondage — worse than that of old
Which God avenged on Pharaoh, — the Bastile.
Ye horrid towers, the abode of broken hearts;
Ye dungeons and ye cages of despair,
That monarchs have supplied from age to age
With music, such as suits their sovereign ears,
The sighs and groans of miserable men!
There's not an English heart that would not leap
To hear that ye were fallen at last; to know
That even our enemies, so oft employ'd
In forging chains for us, themselves were free.
For he, who values liberty, confines
His zeal for her predominance within
No narrow bounds; her cause engages him
Wherever pleaded. 'Tis the cause of man.
There dwell the most forlorn of human kind,
Immured though unaccused, condemn'd untried,
Cruelly spared, and hopeless of escape.
There, like the visionary emblem seen
By him of Babylon, life stands a stump,
And, filleted about with hoops of brass,
Still lives, though all his pleasant boughs are gone.
To count the hour-bell, and expect no change,
And ever, as the sullen sound is heard,
Still to reflect, that though a joyless note
To him whose moments all have one dull pace,
Ten thousand rovers in the world at large
Account it music; that it summons some
To theatre, or jocund feast, or ball;
The wearied hireling finds it a release
From labour; and the lover, who has chid

* The author hopes that he shall not be censured for unnecessary warmth upon so interesting a subject. He is aware, that it is become almost fashionable to stigmatize such sentiments as no better than empty declamation; but it is an ill symptom, and peculiar to modern times.

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Its long delay, feels every welcome stroke
Upon his heart-strings, trembling with delight—
To fly for refuge from distracting thought
To such amusements as ingenious wo
Contrives, hard-shifting, and without her tools—
To read engraven on the mouldy walls,
In staggering types, his predecessor's tale,
A sad memorial, and subjoin his own—
To turn purveyor to an overgorged
And bloated spider, till the pamper'd pest
Is made familiar, watches his approach,
Comes at his call, and serves him for a friend—
To wear out time in numbering to and fro
The studs that thick emboss his iron door;
Then downward and then upward, then aslant
And then alternate; with a sickly hope
By dint of change to give his tasteless task
Some relish; till the sum, exactly found
In all directions, he begins again—
Oh, comfortless existence! hemm'd around
With woes, which who that suffers would not kneel
And beg for exile, or the pangs of death?
That man should thus encroach on fellow man,
Abridge him of his just and native rights,
Eradicate him, tear him from his hold
Upon the endearments of domestic life
And social, nip his fruitfulness and use,
And doom him for perhaps a heedless word
To barrenness, and solitude, and tears,
Moves indignation, makes the name of king
(Of king whom such prerogative can please)
As dreadful as the Manichean god,[2]
Adored through fear, strong only to destroy.
'Tis liberty alone that gives the flower
Of fleeting life its lustre and perfume;
And we are weeds without it. All constraint,
Except what wisdom lays on evil men,
Is evil; hurts the faculties, impedes
Their progress in the road of science; blinds
The eyesight of discovery; and begets,
In those that suffer it a sordid mind,

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Bestial, a meagre intellect, unfit
To be the tenant of man's noble form.
Thee therefore still, blameworthy as thou art,
With all thy loss of empire, and though squeezed
By public exigence, till annual food
Fails for the craving hunger of the state,
Thee I account still happy, and the chief
Among the nations, seeing thou art free,
My native nook of earth! Thy clime is rude,
Replete with vapours, and disposes much
All hearts to sadness, and none more than mine:
Thine unadulterate manners are less soft
And plausible than social life requires,
And thou hast need of discipline and art,
To give thee what politer France receives
From Nature's bounty — that humane address
And sweetness, without which no pleasure is
In converse, either starved by cold reserve,
Or flush'd with fierce dispute, a senseless brawl.
Yet being free I love thee: for the sake
Of that one feature can be well content,
Disgraced as thou hast been, poor as thou art,
To seek no sublunary rest beside.
But, once enslaved, farewell! I could endure
Chains no where patiently; and chains at home,
Where I am free by birthright, not at all.
Then what were left of roughness in the grain
Of British natures, wanting its excuse
That it belongs to freemen, would disgust
And shock me. I should then with double pain
Feel all the rigour of thy fickle clime;
And, if I must bewail the blessing lost,
For which our Hampdens and our Sidneys bled,[3]
I would at least bewail it under skies
Milder, among a people less austere;
In scenes which, having never known me free,
Would not reproach me with the loss I felt.
Do I forebode impossible events,
And tremble at vain dreams? Heaven grant I may!
But the age of virtuous politics is past,
And we are deep in that of cold pretence.

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Patriots are grown too shrewd to be sincere,
And we too wise to trust them. He that takes
Deep in his soft credulity the stamp
Design'd by loud declaimers on the part
Of liberty, themselves the slaves of lust,
Incurs derision for his easy faith
And lack of knowledge, and with cause enough:
For when was public virtue to be found
Where private was not? Can he love the whole,
Who loves no part? He be a nation's friend,
Who is in truth the friend of no man there?
Can he be strenuous in his country's cause,
Who slights the charities, for whose dear sake
That country, if at all, must be beloved?
'Tis therefore sober and good men are sad
For England's glory, seeing it wax pale
And sickly, while her champions wear their hearts
So loose to private duty, that no brain,
Healthful and undisturb'd by factious fumes,
Can dream them trusty to the general weal.
Such were not they of old, whose temper'd blades
Dispersed the shackles of usurp'd control,
And hew'd them link from link; then Albion's sons
Were sons indeed; they felt a filial heart
Beat high within them at a mother's wrongs,
And, shining each in his domestic sphere,
Shone brighter still, once call'd to public view.
'Tis therefore many, whose sequester'd lot
Forbids their interference, looking on,
Anticipate perforce some dire event;
And, seeing the old castle of the state,
That promised once more firmness, so assail'd,
That all its tempest-beaten turrets shake,
Stand motionless expectants of its fall.
All has its date below; the fatal hour
Was register'd in Heaven ere time began.
We turn to dust, and all our mightiest works
Die too: the deep foundations that we lay,
Time ploughs them up, and not a trace remains.
We build with what we deem eternal rock:
A distant age asks where the fabric stood;

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And in the dust, sifted and search'd in vain,
The undiscoverable secret sleeps.
  But there is yet a liberty, unsung
By poets, and by senators unpraised,
Which monarchs cannot grant, nor all the powers
Of earth and hell, confederate, take away:
A liberty, which persecution, fraud,
Oppression, prisons, have no power to bind;
Which whoso tastes can be enslaved no more.
'Tis liberty of heart derived from Heaven,
Bought with His blood, who gave it to mankind,
And seal'd with the same token. It is held
By charter, and that charter sanction'd sure
By the unimpeachable and awful oath
And promise of a God. His other gifts
All bear the royal stamp, that speaks them His,
And are august; but this transcends them all.
His other works, the visible display
Of all-creating energy and might,
Are grand, no doubt, and worthy of the word
That, finding an interminable space
Unoccupied, has fill'd the void so well,
And made so sparkling what was dark before.
But these are not his glory. Man, 'tis true,
Smit with the beauty of so fair a scene,
Might well suppose the artificer divine
Meant it eternal, had he not himself
Pronounced it transient, glorious as it is,
And, still designing a more glorious far,
Doom'd it as insufficient for his praise.
These therefore are occasional, and pass;
Form'd for the confutation of the fool,
Whose lying heart disputes against a God;
That office served, they must be swept away.
Not so the labours of his love: they shine
In other heavens than these that we behold,
And fade not. There is Paradise that fears
No forfeiture, and of its fruits he sends
Large prelibation oft to saints below.
Of these the first in order, and the pledge
And confident assurance of the rest,

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Is liberty; a flight into his arms,
Ere yet mortality's fine threads give way,
A clear escape from tyrannizing lust,
And full immunity from penal wo.
  Chains are the portion of revolted man,
Stripes, and a dungeon; and his body serves
The triple purpose. In that sickly, foul,
Opprobrious residence he finds them all.
Propense his heart to idols, he is held
In silly dotage on created things,
Careless of their Creator. And that low
And sordid gravitation of his powers
To a vile clod so draws him, with such force
Resistless, from the centre he should seek,
That he at last forgets it. All his hopes
Tend downward; his ambition is to sink,
To reach a depth profounder still, and still
Profounder in the fathomless abyss
Of folly, plunging in pursuit of death.
But ere he gain the comfortless repose
He seeks, and acquiescence of his soul
In heaven-renouncing exile, he endures —
What does he not, from lusts opposed in vain,
And self-reproaching conscience? He foresees
The fatal issue to his health, fame, peace,
Fortune, and dignity; the loss of all
That can ennoble man, and make frail life,
Short as it is, supportable. Still worse,
Far worse than all the plagues with which his sins
Infect his happiest moments, he forebodes
Ages of hopeless misery. Future death,
And death still future. Not a hasty stroke,
Like that which sends him to the dusty grave;
But unrepealable enduring death.
Scripture is still a trumpet to his fears:
What none can prove a forgery may be true,
What none but bad men wish exploded, must.
That scruple checks him. Riot is not loud
Nor drunk enough to drown it. In the midst
Of laughter his compunctions are sincere;
And he abhors the jest by which he shines.

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Remorse begets reform. His master-lust
Falls first before his resolute rebuke,
And seems dethroned and vanquish'd. Peace ensues,
But spurious and short-lived; the puny child
Of self-congratulating pride, begot
On fancied innocence. Again he falls,
And fights again; but finds his best essay
A presage ominous, portending still
Its own dishonour by a worse relapse.
Till Nature, unavailing Nature, foil'd
So oft, and wearied in the vain attempt,
Scoffs at her own performance. Reason now
Takes part with appetite, and pleads the cause
Perversely, which of late she so condemn'd;
With shallow shifts and old devices, worn
And tatter'd in the service of debauch,
Covering his shame from his offended sight.
"Hath God indeed given appetites to man,
And stored the earth so plenteously with means
To gratify the hunger of his wish;
And doth he reprobate, and will he damn
The use of his own bounty? making first
So frail a kind, and then enacting laws
So strict, that less than perfect must despair?
Falsehood! which whoso but suspects of truth
Dishonours God, and makes a slave of man.
Do they themselves, who undertake for hire
The teacher's office, and dispense at large
Their weekly dole of edifying strains,
Attend to their own music? have they faith
In what with such solemnity of tone
And gesture they propound to our belief?
Nay — conduct hath the loudest tongue. The voice
Is but an instrument, on which the priest
May play what tune he pleases. In the deed
The unequivocal, authentic deed,
We find sound argument, we read the heart."
Such reasonings (if that name must need belong
To excuses in which reason has no part)
Serve to compose a spirit well inclined
To live on terms of amity with vice,

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And sin without disturbance. Often urged,
(As often as, libidinous discourse
Exhausted, he resorts to solemn themes
Of theological and grave import)
They gain at last his unreserved assent;
Till, harden'd his heart's temper in the forge
Of lust, and on the anvil of despair,
He slights the strokes of conscience. Nothing moves,
Or nothing much, his constancy in ill;
Vain tampering has but foster'd his disease;
'Tis desperate, and he sleeps the sleep of death.
Haste now, philosopher, and set him free:
Charm the deaf serpent wisely: make him hear
Of rectitude and fitness, moral truth
How lovely, and the moral sense how sure,
Consulted and obey'd, to guide his steps
Directly to the FIRST AND ONLY FAIR.*
Spare not in such a cause. Spend all the powers
Of rant and rhapsody in virtue's praise:
Be most sublimely good, verbosely grand,
And with poetic trappings grace thy prose,
Till it outmantle all the pride of verse.—
Ah, tinkling cymbal, and high-sounding brass,
Smitten in vain! such music cannot charm
The eclipse that intercepts truth's heavenly beam,
And chills and darkens a wide-wandering soul.
The *still small voice* is wanted. He must speak,
Whose word leaps forth at once to its effect;
Who calls forth things that are not, and they come.
Grace makes the slave a freeman. 'Tis a change,
That turns to ridicule the turgid speech
And stately tone of moralists, who boast,
As if, like him of fabulous renown,
They had indeed ability to smooth
The shag of savage nature, and were each
An Orpheus, and omnipotent in song:
But transformation of apostate man
From fool to wise, from earthly to divine,

* The *το καλον* of the Greek philosophy, or the moral fitness of the moderns; the one an instinctive longing, the other a vain and presumptuous substitute for gospel truth.

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Is work for Him that made him. He alone,
And He by means in philosophic eyes
Trivial and worthy of disdain, achieves
The wonder; humanizing what is brute
In the lost kind, extracting from the lips
Of asps their venom, overpowering strength
By weakness, and hostility by love.
Patriots have toil'd, and in their country's cause
Bled nobly; and their deeds, as they deserve,
Receive proud recompense. We give in charge
Their names to the sweet lyre. The historic muse,
Proud of the treasure, marches with it down
To latest times; and sculpture, in her turn,
Gives bond in stone and ever-during brass
To guard them, and to immortalize her trust:
But fairer wreaths are due, though never paid,
To those who, posted at the shrine of Truth,
Have fallen in her defence. A patriot's blood,
Well spent in such a strife, may earn indeed,
And for a time ensure, to his loved land
The sweets of liberty and equal laws;
But martyrs struggle for a brighter prize,
And win it with more pain. Their blood is shed
In confirmation of the noblest claim,
Our claim to feed upon immortal truth,
To walk with God, to be divinely free,
To soar, and to anticipate the skies.
Yet few remember them. They lived unknown,
Till Persecution dragg'd them into fame,
And chased them up to heaven. Their ashes flew—
No marble tells us whither. With their names
No bard embalms and sanctifies his song:
And history, so warm on meaner themes,
Is cold on this. She execrates indeed
The tyranny that doom'd them to the fire,
But gives the glorious sufferers little praise.*
He is the freeman whom the truth makes free,
And all are slaves beside. There's not a chain

* See Hume.—*Author's Note.* See also his own letters, where other writers are justly blamed for a similar omission.

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That hellish foes, confederate for his harm,
Can wind around him, but he casts it off
With as much ease as Samson his green withes.
He looks abroad into the varied field
Of nature, and though poor perhaps, compared
With those whose mansions glitter in his sight,
Calls the delightful scenery all his own.
His are the mountains, and the valleys his,
And the resplendent rivers: his to enjoy
With a propriety that none can feel,
But who, with filial confidence inspired,
Can lift to heaven an unpresumptuous eye,
And smiling say,—"My Father made them all!"
Are they not his by a peculiar right,
And by an emphasis of interest his,
Whose eye they fill with tears of holy joy,
Whose heart with praise, and whose exalted mind
With worthy thoughts of that unwearied love,
That plann'd, and built, and still upholds, a world
So clothed with beauty for rebellious man?
Yes—ye may fill your garners, ye that reap
The loaded soil, and ye may waste much good
In senseless riot; but ye will not find
In feast, or in the chase, in song or dance,
A liberty like his, who, unimpeach'd
Of usurpation, and to no man's wrong,
Appropriates nature as his Father's work,
And has a richer use of yours than you.
He is indeed a freeman. Free by birth
Of no mean city; plann'd or ere the hills
Were built, the fountains open'd, or the sea
With all his roaring multitude of waves.
His freedom is the same in every state;
And no condition of this changeful life,
So manifold in cares, whose every day
Brings its own evil with it, makes it less:
For he has wings, that neither sickness, pain,
Nor penury, can cripple or confine.
No nook so narrow but he spreads them there
With ease, and is at large. The oppressor holds
His body bound, but knows not what a range

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His spirit takes unconscious of a chain;
And that to bind him is a vain attempt,
Whom God delights in, and in whom he dwells.
  Acquaint thyself with God, if thou wouldst taste
His works. Admitted once to his embrace,
Thou shalt perceive that thou wast blind before:
Thine eye shall be instructed; and thine heart,
Made pure, shall relish with divine delight,
Till then unfelt, what hands divine have wrought.
Brutes graze the mountain top, with faces prone,
And eyes intent upon the scanty herb
It yields them; or, recumbent on its brow,
Ruminate heedless of the scene outspread
Beneath, beyond, and stretching far away
From inland regions to the distant main.
Man views it, and admires; but rests content
With what he views. The landscape has his praise,
But not its Author. Unconcern'd who form'd
The paradise he sees, he finds it such,
And, such well pleased to find it, asks no more.
Not so the mind that has been touch'd from Heaven,
And in the school of sacred wisdom taught
To read His wonders, in whose thought the world,
Fair as it is, existed ere it was.
Not for its own sake merely, but for His
Much more who fashion'd it, he gives it praise;
Praise that from earth resulting, as it ought,
To earth's acknowledged Sovereign, finds at once
Its only just proprietor in Him.
The soul that sees Him, or receives sublimed
New faculties, or learns at least to employ
More worthily the powers she own'd before,
Discerns in all things what, with stupid gaze
Of ignorance, till then she overlook'd,
A ray of heavenly light, gilding all forms
Terrestrial in the vast and the minute;
The unambiguous footsteps of the God
Who gives its lustre to an insect's wing,
And wheels his throne upon the rolling worlds.
Much conversant with Heaven, she often holds
With those fair ministers of light to man,

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That fill the skies nightly with silent pomp,
Sweet conference. Inquires what strains were they
With which heaven rang, when every star, in haste
To gratulate the new-created earth,
Sent forth a voice, and all the sons of God
Shouted for joy.—"Tell me, ye shining hosts,
That navigate a sea that knows no storms,
Beneath a vault unsullied with a cloud,
If from your elevation, whence ye view
Distinctly scenes invisible to man,
And systems, of whose birth no tidings yet
Have reach'd this nether world, ye spy a race
Favour'd as ours; transgressors from the womb,
And hasting to a grave, yet doom'd to rise,
And to possess a brighter heaven than yours?
As one who, long detain'd on foreign shores,
Pants to return, and when he sees afar
His country's weather-bleach'd and batter'd rocks
From the green wave emerging, darts an eye
Radiant with joy towards the happy land;
So I with animated hopes behold,
And many an aching wish, your beamy fires,
That shew like beacons in the blue abyss,
Ordain'd to guide the embodied spirit home
From toilsome life to never-ending rest.
Love kindles as I gaze. I feel desires
That give assurance of their own success,
And that, infused from Heaven, must thither tend."
So reads he Nature, whom the lamp of truth
Illuminates. Thy lamp, mysterious Word!
Which whoso sees no longer wanders lost,
With intellects bemazed in endless doubt,
But runs the road of wisdom. Thou hast built,
With means that were not till by thee employ'd,
Worlds that had never been hadst thou in strength
Been less, or less benevolent than strong.
They are thy witnesses, who speak thy power
And goodness infinite, but speak in ears
That hear not, or receive not their report.
In vain thy creatures testify of thee
Till thou proclaim thyself. Theirs is indeed

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A teaching voice; but 'tis the praise of thine,
That whom it teaches it makes prompt to learn,
And with the boon gives talents for its use.
Till thou art heard, imaginations vain
Possess the heart, and fables false as hell;
Yet, deem'd oracular, lure down to death
The uninform'd and heedless souls of men.
We give to chance, blind chance, ourselves as blind,
The glory of thy work; which yet appears
Perfect and unimpeachable of blame,
Challenging human scrutiny, and proved
Then skilful most when most severely judged.
But Chance is not; or is not where thou reign'st;
Thy providence forbids that fickle power
(If power she be, that works but to confound)
To mix her wild vagaries with thy laws.
Yet thus we dote, refusing while we can
Instruction, and inventing to ourselves
Gods such as guilt makes welcome; gods that sleep,
Or disregard our follies, or that sit
Amused spectators of this bustling stage.
Thee we reject, unable to abide
Thy purity, till pure as thou art pure,
Made such by thee, we love thee for that cause,
For which we shunn'd and hated thee before.
Then we are free. Then liberty, like day,
Breaks on the soul, and by a flash from heaven
Fires all the faculties with glorious joy.
A voice is heard that mortal ears hear not
Till thou hast touch'd them; 'tis the voice of song,
A loud hosanna sent from all thy works,
Which he that hears it with a shout repeats,
And adds his rapture to the general praise.
In that blest moment Nature, throwing wide*
Her veil opaque, discloses with a smile
The Author of her beauties, who, retired
Behind His own creation, works unseen
By the impure, and hears His power denied.

* Darwin has founded his "Temple of Nature" on this beautiful idea, but without eliciting from it the same Christian inference.

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Thou art the source and centre of all minds,
Their only point of rest, eternal Word!
From thee departing they are lost, and rove
At random without honour, hope, or peace.
From thee is all that soothes the life of man,
His high endeavour, and his glad success,
His strength to suffer, and his will to serve.
But O thou bounteous Giver of all good,
Thou art of all thy gifts thyself the crown!
Give what thou canst, without thee we are poor;
And with thee rich, take what thou wilt away.

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THE TASK.

BOOK VI.

THE WINTER WALK AT NOON.

ARGUMENT OF THE SIXTH BOOK.

Bells at a distance. — Their effect. — A fine noon in winter. — A sheltered walk. — Meditation better than books. — Our familiarity with the course of nature makes it appear less wonderful than it is. — The transformation that spring effects in a shrubbery described. — A mistake concerning the course of nature corrected. — God maintains it by an unremitted act. — The amusements fashionable at this hour of the day reproved. — Animals happy, a delightful sight. — Origin of cruelty to animals. — That it is a great crime proved from Scripture. — That proof illustrated by a tale. — A line drawn between the lawful and unlawful destruction of them. — Their good and useful properties insisted on. — Apology for the encomiums bestowed by the author on animals. — Instances of man's extravagant praise of man. — The groans of the creation shall have an end. — A view taken of the restoration of all things. — An invocation and an invitation of Him who shall bring it to pass. — The retired man vindicated from the charge of uselessness. — Conclusion.

THERE is in souls a sympathy with sounds,
And as the mind is pitch'd the ear is pleased
With melting airs or martial, brisk or grave.
Some chord in unison with what we hear
Is touch'd within us, and the heart replies.
How soft the music of those village bells,
Falling at intervals upon the ear
In cadence sweet! now dying all away,
Now pealing loud again, and louder still,
Clear and sonorous, as the gale comes on.
With easy force it opens all the cells
Where memory slept. Wherever I have heard
A kindred melody, the scene recurs,
And with it all its pleasures and its pains.
Such comprehensive views the spirit takes,

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That in a few short moments I retrace
(As in a map the voyager his course)
The windings of my way through many years.
Short as in retrospect the journey seems,
It seem'd not always short; the rugged path,
And prospect oft so dreary and forlorn,
Moved many a sigh at its disheartening length.
Yet feeling present evils, while the past
Faintly impress the mind, or not at all,
How readily we wish time spent revoked,
That we might try the ground again, where once
(Through inexperience, as we now perceive)
We miss'd that happiness we might have found!
Some friend is gone, perhaps his son's best friend,
A father, whose authority, in show
When most severe, and mustering all its force,
Was but the graver countenance of love;
Whose favour, like the clouds of spring, might lower
And utter now and then an awful voice,
But had a blessing in its darkest frown,
Threatening at once and nourishing the plant.
We loved, but not enough, the gentle hand
That rear'd us. At a thoughtless age, allured
By every gilded folly, we renounced
His sheltering side, and wilfully forewent
That converse which we now in vain regret.
How gladly would the man recall to life
The boy's neglected sire! a mother too,
That softer friend, perhaps more gladly still,
Might he demand them at the gates of death.
Sorrow has, since they went, subdued and tamed
The playful humour; he could now endure,
(Himself grown sober in the vale of tears,)
And feel a parent's presence no restraint.
But not to understand a treasure's worth,
Till time has stolen away the slighted good,
Is cause of half the poverty we feel,
And makes the world the wilderness it is.
The few that pray at all pray oft amiss,
And, seeking grace to improve the prize they hold,
Would urge a wiser suit than asking more.

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The night was winter in his roughest mood;
The morning sharp and clear. But now, at noon,
Upon the southern side of the slant hills,
And where the woods fence off the northern blast,
The season smiles, resigning all its rage,
And has the warmth of May. The vault is blue
Without a cloud, and white without a speck
The dazzling splendour of the scene below.
Again the harmony comes o'er the vale;
And through the trees I view the embattled tower,
Whence all the music. I again perceive
The soothing influence of the wafted strains,
And settle in soft musings as I tread
The walk, still verdant, under oaks and elms,
Whose outspread branches overarch the glade.
The roof, though moveable through all its length
As the wind sways it, has yet well sufficed,
And, intercepting in their silent fall
The frequent flakes, has kept a path for me.
No noise is here, or none that hinders thought.
The redbreast warbles still, but is content
With slender notes, and more than half suppress'd;
Pleased with his solitude, and flitting light
From spray to spray, where'er he rests he shakes
From many a twig the pendent drops of ice,
That tinkle in the wither'd leaves below.
Stillness, accompanied with sounds so soft,
Charms more than silence. Meditation here
May think down hours to moments. Here the heart
May give a useful lesson to the head,
And learning wiser grow without his books.[1]
Knowledge and wisdom, far from being one,
Have ofttimes no connection. Knowledge dwells
In heads replete with thoughts of other men;
Wisdom in minds attentive to their own.
Knowledge, a rude unprofitable mass,
The mere materials with which wisdom builds,
Till smooth'd, and squared, and fitted to its place,
Does but encumber whom it seems to enrich,
Knowledge is proud that he has learn'd so much;
Wisdom is humble that he knows no more.

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Books are not seldom talismans and spells,
By which the magic art of shrewder wits
Holds an unthinking multitude enthrall'd.
Some to the fascination of a name
Surrender judgment, hoodwink'd. Some the style
Infatuates, and through labyrinths and wilds
Of error leads them, by a tune entranced.
While sloth seduces more, too weak to bear
The insupportable fatigue of thought,
And swallowing therefore without pause or choice
The total grist unsifted, husks and all.
But trees and rivulets, whose rapid course
Defies the check of winter, haunts of deer,
And sheep-walks populous with bleating lambs,
And lanes in which the primrose ere her time
Peeps through the moss that clothes the hawthorn root,
Deceive no student. Wisdom there, and truth,
Not shy, as in the world, and to be won
By slow solicitation, seize at once
The roving thought, and fix it on themselves.
  What prodigies can power divine perform
More grand than it produces year by year,
And all in sight of inattentive man?
Familiar with the effect we slight the cause,
And in the constancy of Nature's course,
The regular return of genial months,
And renovation of a faded world,
See nought to wonder at. Should God again,
As once in Gibeon, interrupt the race
Of the undeviating and punctual sun,
How would the world admire! but speaks it less
An agency divine, to make him know
His moment when to sink and when to rise,
Age after age, than to arrest his course?
All we behold is miracle; but seen
So duly, all is miracle in vain.
Where now the vital energy that moved,
While summer was, the pure and subtle lymph
Through the imperceptible meandering veins
Of leaf and flower? It sleeps; and the icy touch
Of unprolific winter has impress'd

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A cold stagnation on the intestine tide.
But let the months go round, a few short months,
And all shall be restored. These naked shoots,
Barren as lances, among which the wind
Makes wintry music, sighing as it goes,
Shall put their graceful foliage on again,
And more aspiring, and with ampler spread,
Shall boast new charms, and more than they have lost.
Then each, in its peculiar honours clad,
Shall publish even to the distant eye
Its family and tribe. Laburnum, rich
In streaming gold; syringa, ivory pure;
The scentless and the scented rose; this red,
And of an humbler growth, the other* tall,
And throwing up into the darkest gloom
Of neighbouring cypress, or more sable yew,
Her silver globes, light as the foamy surf
That the wind severs from the broken wave;
The lilac, various in array, now white,
Now sanguine, and her beauteous head now set
With purple spikes pyramidal, as if
Studious of ornament, yet unresolved
Which hue she most approved, she chose them all;
Copious of flowers the woodbine, pale and wan,
But well compensating her sickly looks
With never-cloying odours, early and late;
Hypericum all bloom, so thick a swarm
Of flowers, like flies clothing her slender rods,
That scarce a leaf appears; mezereon too,
Though leafless, well attired, and thick beset
With blushing wreaths, investing every spray;
Althæa with the purple eye; the broom,
Yellow and bright, as bullion unalloy'd,
Her blossoms; and luxuriant above all
The jasmine, throwing wide her elegant sweets,
The deep dark green of whose unvarnish'd leaf
Makes more conspicuous, and illumines more,
The bright profusion of her scatter'd stars.—
These have been, and these shall be in their day;

* The Guelder rose.

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And all this uniform uncolour'd scene
Shall be dismantled of its fleecy load,
And flush into variety again.
From dearth to plenty, and from death to life,
Is Nature's progress, when she lectures man
In heavenly truth; evincing, as she makes
The grand transition, that there lives and works
A soul in all things, and that soul is God.
The beauties of the wilderness are his,
That makes so gay the solitary place,
Where no eye sees them. And the fairer forms,
That cultivation glories in, are his.
He sets the bright procession on its way,
And marshals all the order of the year;
He marks the bounds which winter may not pass,
And blunts his pointed fury; in its case,
Russet and rude, folds up the tender germ,
Uninjured, with inimitable art;
And ere one flowery season fades and dies,
Designs the blooming wonders of the next.
  Some say that in the origin of things,
When all creation started into birth,
The infant elements received a law
From which they swerve not since: that under force
Of that controlling ordinance they move,
And need not His immediate hand, who first
Prescribed their course, to regulate it now.
Thus dream they, and contrive to save a God
The encumbrance of his own concerns, and spare
The great Artificer of all that moves
The stress of a continual act, the pain
Of unremitted vigilance and care,
As too laborious and severe a task.
So man, the moth, is not afraid, it seems,
To span Omnipotence, and measure might
That knows no measure, by the scanty rule
And standard of his own, that is to-day,
And is not ere to-morrow's sun go down.
But how should matter occupy a charge,
Dull as it is, and satisfy a law
So vast in its demands, unless impell'd

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To ceaseless service by a ceaseless force,
And under pressure of some conscious cause?
The Lord of all, himself through all diffused,
Sustains, and is the life of all that lives.
Nature is but a name for an effect,
Whose cause is God. He feeds the sacred fire
By which the mighty process is maintain'd,
Who sleeps not, is not weary; in whose sight
Slow circling ages are as transient days;
Whose work is without labour; whose designs
No flaw deforms, no difficulty thwarts;
And whose beneficence no charge exhausts.
Him blind antiquity profaned, not served,
With self-taught rites, and under various names,
Female and male, Pomona, Pales, Pan,
And Flora, and Vertumnus; peopling earth
With tutelary goddesses and gods,
That were not; and commending as they would
To each some province, garden, field, or grove.
But all are under one. One spirit—His
Who wore the platted thorns with bleeding brows,
Rules universal Nature. Not a flower
But shews some touch, in freckle, streak, or stain,
Of his unrivall'd pencil. He inspires
Their balmy odours, and imparts their hues,
And bathes their eyes with nectar, and includes
In grains as countless as the seaside sands,
The forms with which he sprinkles all the earth.
Happy who walks with him! whom what he finds
Of flavour or of scent in fruit or flower,
Or what he views of beautiful or grand
In Nature, from the broad majestic oak
To the green blade that twinkles in the sun,
Prompts with remembrance of a present God.
His presence, who made all so fair, perceived,
Makes all still fairer. As with him no scene
Is dreary, so with him all seasons please.
Though winter had been none, had man been true,
And earth be punish'd for its tenant's sake,
Yet not in vengeance; as this smiling sky,
So soon succeeding such an angry night,

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And these dissolving snows, and this clear stream
Recovering fast its liquid music, prove.
  Who, then, that has a mind well strung and tuned
To contemplation, and within his reach
A scene so friendly to his favourite task,
Would waste attention at the chequer'd board,
His host of wooden warriors to and fro
Marching and countermarching, with an eye
As fix'd as marble, with a forehead ridged
And furrow'd into storms, and with a hand
Trembling, as if eternity were hung
In balance on his conduct of a pin?
Nor envies he aught more their idle sport,
Who pant with application misapplied
To trivial toys, and, pushing ivory balls
Across a velvet level, feel a joy
Akin to rapture, when the bauble finds
Its destined goal, of difficult access.
Nor deems he wiser him who gives his noon
To Miss, the mercer's plague, from shop to shop
Wandering, and littering with unfolded silks
The polish'd counter, and approving none,
Or promising with smiles to call again.
Nor him who, by his vanity seduced,
And soothed into a dream that he discerns
The difference of a Guido from a daub,
Frequents the crowded auction: station'd there
As duly as the Langford * of the show,
With glass at eye, and catalogue in hand,
And tongue accomplish'd in the fulsome cant
And pedantry that coxcombs learn with ease;
Oft as the price-deciding hammer falls,
He notes it in his book, then raps his box,
Swears 'tis a bargain, rails at his hard fate,
That he has let it pass — but never bids.
  Here unmolested, through whatever sign
The sun proceeds, I wander. Neither mist,
Nor freezing sky nor sultry, checking me,
Nor stranger intermeddling with my joy.

* A famous auctioneer in articles of *vertu*.

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Even in the spring and playtime of the year,
That calls the unwonted villager abroad
With all her little ones, a sportive train,
To gather kingcups in the yellow mead,
And prink their hair with daisies, or to pick
A cheap but wholesome salad from the brook,
These shades are all my own. The timorous hare,
Grown so familiar with her frequent guest,
Scarce shuns me; and the stockdove, unalarm'd,
Sits cooing in the pine tree, nor suspends
His long love-ditty for my near approach.
Drawn from his refuge in some lonely elm,
That age or injury has hollow'd deep,
Where, on his bed of wool and matted leaves,
He has outslept the winter, ventures forth
To frisk a while, and bask in the warm sun,
The squirrel, flippant, pert, and full of play;
He sees me, and at once, swift as a bird,
Ascends the neighbouring beech; there whisks his brush,
And perks his ears, and stamps, and cries aloud,
With all the prettiness of feign'd alarm,
And anger insignificantly fierce.
  The heart is hard in nature, and unfit
For human fellowship, as being void
Of sympathy, and therefore dead alike
To love and friendship both, that is not pleased
With sight of animals enjoying life,
Nor feels their happiness augment his own.
The bounding fawn, that darts across the glade
When none pursues, through mere delight of heart,
And spirits buoyant with excess of glee;
The horse as wanton, and almost as fleet,
That skims the spacious meadow at full speed,
Then stops, and snorts, and, throwing high his heels,
Starts to the voluntary race again;
The very kine, that gambol at high noon,
The total herd receiving first from one,
That leads the dance, a summons to be gay,
Though wild their strange vagaries, and uncouth
Their efforts, yet resolved with one consent
To give such act and utterance as they may

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To ecstasy too big to be suppress'd—
These, and a thousand images of bliss,
With which kind Nature graces every scene,
Where cruel man defeats not her design,
Impart to the benevolent, who wish
All that are capable of pleasure pleased,
A far superior happiness to theirs,
The comfort of a reasonable joy.
  Man scarce had risen, obedient to His call
Who form'd him from the dust, his future grave,
When he was crown'd as never king was since.
God set the diadem upon his head,
And angel choirs attended. Wondering stood
The new-made monarch, while before him pass'd,
All happy, and all perfect in their kind,
The creatures, summon'd from their various haunts,
To see their sovereign, and confess his sway.
Vast was his empire, absolute his power,
Or bounded only by a law, whose force
'Twas his sublimest privilege to feel
And own, the law of universal love.
He ruled with meekness, they obey'd with joy;
No cruel purpose lurk'd within his heart,
And no distrust of his intent in theirs.
So Eden was a scene of harmless sport,
Where kindness on his part, who ruled the whole,
Begat a tranquil confidence in all,
And fear as yet was not, nor cause for fear.
But sin marr'd all; and the revolt of man,
That source of evils not exhausted yet,
Was punish'd with revolt of his from him.
Garden of God, how terrible the change
Thy groves and lawns then witnessed! Every heart,
Each animal, of every name, conceived
A jealousy, and an instinctive fear,
And, conscious of some danger, either fled
Precipitate the loathed abode of man,
Or growl'd defiance in such angry sort,
As taught him too to tremble in his turn.
Thus harmony and family accord
Were driven from Paradise; and in that hour

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The seeds of cruelty, that since have swell'd
To such gigantic and enormous growth,
Were sown in human nature's fruitful soil.
Hence date the persecution and the pain
That man inflicts on all inferior kinds,
Regardless of their plaints. To make him sport,
To gratify the frenzy of his wrath,
Or his base gluttony, are causes good
And just in his account, why bird and beast
Should suffer torture, and the streams be dyed
With blood of their inhabitants impaled.
Earth groans beneath the burden of a war
Waged with defenceless innocence, while he,
Not satisfied to prey on all around,
Adds tenfold bitterness to death by pangs
Needless, and first torments ere he devours.
Now happiest they, that occupy the scenes
The most remote from his abhorr'd resort,
Whom once, as delegate of God on earth,
They fear'd, and as his perfect image loved.
The wilderness is theirs, with all its caves,
Its hollow glens, its thickets, and its plains,
Unvisited by man. There they are free,
And howl and roar as likes them, uncontroll'd;
Nor ask his leave to slumber or to play.
Wo to the tyrant, if he dare intrude
Within the confines of their wild domain:
The lion tells him, — I am monarch here;
And, if he spare him, spares him on the terms
Of royal mercy, and through generous scorn
To rend a victim trembling at his foot.
In measure, as by force of instinct drawn,
Or by necessity constrain'd, they live
Dependent upon man; those in his fields,
These at his crib, and some beneath his roof.
They prove too often at how dear a rate
He sells protection. Witness at his foot
The spaniel dying for some venial fault
Under dissection of the knotted scourge;
Witness the patient ox, with stripes and yells
Driven to the slaughter, goaded, as he runs,

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To madness; while the savage at his heels
Laughs at the frantic sufferer's fury, spent
Upon the guiltless passenger o'erthrown.
He too is witness, noblest of the train
That wait on man, the flight-performing horse;
With unsuspecting readiness he takes
His murderer on his back, and push'd all day,
With bleeding sides and flanks that heave for life,
To the far distant goal, arrives and dies.
So little mercy shews who needs so much!
Does law, so jealous in the cause of man,
Denounce no doom on the delinquent? None.
He lives, and o'er his brimming beaker boasts
(As if barbarity were high desert)
The inglorious feat, and clamorous in praise
Of the poor brute, seems wisely to suppose
The honours of his matchless horse his own.
But many a crime, deem'd innocent on earth,
Is register'd in heaven; and these no doubt
Have each their record, with a curse annex'd.
Man may dismiss compassion from his heart,
But God will never. When he charged the Jew
To assist his foe's down-fallen beast to rise;
And when the bush-exploring boy, that seized
The young, to let the parent bird go free;
Proved he not plainly, that his meaner works
Are yet his care, and have an interest all,
All, in the universal Father's love?
On Noah, and in him on all mankind,
The charter was conferr'd, by which we hold
The flesh of animals in fee, and claim
O'er all we feed on power of life and death.
But read the instrument, and mark it well:
The oppression of a tyrannous control
Can find no warrant there. Feed then, and yield
Thanks for thy food. Carnivorous, through sin,
Feed on the slain, but spare the living brute!
  The Governor of all, Himself to all
So bountiful, in whose attentive ear
The unfledged raven and the lion's whelp
Plead not in vain for pity on the pangs

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Of hunger unassuaged, has interposed,
Not seldom, His avenging arm, to smite
The injurious trampler upon Nature's law,
That claims forbearance even for a brute.
He hates the hardness of a Balaam's heart;
And, prophet as he was, he might not strike
The blameless animal, without rebuke,
On which he rode. Her opportune offence
Saved him, or the unrelenting seer had died.
He sees that human equity is slack
To interfere, though in so just a cause;
And makes the task his own. Inspiring dumb
And helpless victims with a sense so keen
Of injury, with such knowledge of their strength,
And such sagacity to take revenge,
That oft the beast has seem'd to judge the man.
An ancient, not a legendary tale,
By one of sound intelligence rehearsed,
(If such who plead for Providence may seem
In modern eyes,) shall make the doctrine clear.
Where England, stretch'd towards the setting sun,
Narrow and long, o'erlooks the western wave,
Dwelt young Misagathus;* a scorner he
Of God and goodness, atheist in ostent,
Vicious in act, in temper savage fierce.
He journey'd; and his chance was, as he went,
To join a traveller, of far different note,
Evander,† famed for piety, for years
Deserving honour, but for wisdom more.
Fame had not left the venerable man
A stranger to the manners of the youth,
Whose face too was familiar to his view.
Their way was on the margin of the land,
O'er the green summit of the rocks, whose base
Beats back the roaring surge, scarce heard so high.
The charity that warm'd his heart was moved
At sight of the man-monster. With a smile
Gentle, and affable, and full of grace,
As fearful of offending whom he wish'd

* Hater of good. † A good man.

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Much to persuade, he plied his ear with truths,
Not harshly thunder'd forth, or rudely press'd,
But, like his purpose, gracious, kind, and sweet.
"And dost thou dream," the impenetrable man
Exclaim'd, "that me the lullabies of age,
And fantasies of dotards such as thou,
Can cheat, or move a moment's fear in me?
Mark now the proof I give thee, that the brave
Need no such aids as superstition lends
To steel their hearts against the dread of death."
He spoke, and to the precipice at hand
Push'd with a madman's fury. Fancy shrinks,
And the blood thrills and curdles, at the thought
Of such a gulf as he design'd his grave.
But, though the felon on his back could dare
The dreadful leap, more rational, his steed
Declined the death, and wheeling swiftly round,
Or e'er his hoof had press'd the crumbling verge,
Baffled his rider, saved against his will.
The frenzy of the brain may be redress'd
By medicine well applied, but without grace
The heart's insanity admits no cure.
Enraged the more, by what might have reform'd
His horrible intent, again he sought
Destruction, with a zeal to be destroy'd,
With sounding whip, and rowels dyed in blood.
But still in vain. The Providence, that meant
A longer date to the far nobler beast,
Spared yet again the ignobler for his sake.
And now, his prowess proved, and his sincere
Incurable obduracy evinced,
His rage grew cool; and, pleased perhaps to have earn'd
So cheaply the renown of that attempt,
With looks of some complacence he resumed
His road, deriding much the blank amaze
Of good Evander, still where he was left
Fix'd motionless, and petrified with dread.
So on they fared: discourse on other themes
Ensuing seem'd to obliterate the past;
And tamer far for so much fury shewn,

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(As is the course of rash and fiery men)
The rude companion smiled, as if transform'd.
But 'twas a transient calm. A storm was near —
An unsuspected storm. His hour was come.
The impious challenger of power divine
Was now to learn, that Heaven, though slow to wrath,
Is never with impunity defied.
His horse, as he had caught his master's mood,
Snorting, and starting into sudden rage,
Unbidden, and not now to be controll'd,
Rush'd to the cliff, and, having reach'd it, stood.
At once the shock unseated him: he flew
Sheer o'er the craggy barrier; and, immersed
Deep in the flood, found, when he sought it not,
The death he had deserved, and died alone.
So God wrought double justice; made the fool
The victim of his own tremendous choice,
And taught a brute the way to safe revenge.[2]

I would not enter on my list of friends
(Though graced with polish'd manners and fine sense,
Yet wanting sensibility) the man
Who needlessly sets foot upon a worm.
An inadvertent step may crush the snail
That crawls at evening in the public path;
But he that has humanity, forewarn'd,
Will tread aside, and let the reptile live.
The creeping vermin, loathsome to the sight,
And charged perhaps with venom, that intrudes,
A visiter unwelcome, into scenes
Sacred to neatness and repose, the alcove,
The chamber, or refectory, may die:
A necessary act incurs no blame.
Not so when, held within their proper bounds,
And guiltless of offence, they range the air,
Or take their pastime in the spacious field;
There they are privileged; and he that hunts
Or harms them there is guilty of a wrong,
Disturbs the economy of Nature's realm,
Who, when she form'd, design'd them an abode.
The sum is this. If man's convenience, health,
Or safety, interfere, his rights and claims

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Are paramount, and must extinguish theirs.
Else they are all — the meanest things that are —
As free to live, and to enjoy that life,
As God was free to form them at the first,
Who in his sovereign wisdom made them all.
Ye, therefore, who love mercy, teach your sons
To love it too. The springtime of our years
Is soon dishonour'd and defiled in most
By budding ills, that ask a prudent hand
To check them. But, alas! none sooner shoots,
If unrestrain'd, into luxuriant growth,
Than cruelty, most devilish of them all.
Mercy to him that shews it, is the rule
And righteous limitation of its act,
By which Heaven moves in pardoning guilty man;
And he that shews none, being ripe in years,
And conscious of the outrage he commits,
Shall seek it, and not find it, in his turn.
  Distinguish'd much by reason, and still more
By our capacity of grace divine,
From creatures that exist but for our sake,
Which, having served us, perish, we are held
Accountable; and God some future day
Will reckon with us roundly for the abuse
Of what he deems no mean or trivial trust.
Superior as we are, they yet depend
Not more on human help than we on theirs.
Their strength, or speed, or vigilance, were given
In aid of our defects. In some are found
Such teachable and apprehensive parts,
That man's attainments in his own concerns,
Match'd with the expertness of the brutes in theirs,
Are ofttimes vanquish'd, and thrown far behind.
Some shew that nice sagacity of smell,
And read with such discernment, in the port
And figure of the man, his secret aim,
That oft we owe our safety to a skill
We could not teach, and must despair to learn.
But learn we might, if not too proud to stoop
To quadruped instructors, many a good
And useful quality, and virtue too,

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Rarely exemplified among ourselves;
Attachment never to be wean'd, or changed
By any change of fortune; proof alike
Against unkindness, absence, and neglect;
Fidelity, that neither bribe nor threat
Can move or warp; and gratitude for small
And trivial favours, lasting as the life,
And glistening even in the dying eye.
  Man praises man. Desert in arts or arms
Wins public honour; and ten thousand sit
Patiently present at a sacred song,
Commemoration-mad; content to hear
(O wonderful effect of music's power!)
MESSIAH's eulogy for Handel's sake.
But less, methinks, than sacrilege might serve —
(For, was it less, what heathen would have dared
To strip Jove's statue of his oaken wreath,
And hang it up in honour of a man?)
Much less might serve, when all that we design
Is but to gratify an itching ear,
And give the day to a musician's praise.
Remember Handel? Who, that was not born
Deaf as the dead to harmony, forgets,
Or can, the more than Homer of his age?
Yes — we remember him; and, while we praise
A talent so divine, remember too
That His most holy book, from whom it came,
Was never meant, was never used before,
To buckram out the memory of a man.
But hush! — the muse perhaps is too severe;
And with a gravity beyond the size
And measure of the offence, rebukes a deed
Less impious than absurd, and owing more
To want of judgment than to wrong design.
So in the chapel of old Ely House,
When wandering Charles,[3] who meant to be the third,
Had fled from William, and the news was fresh,
The simple clerk, but loyal, did announce,
And eke did rear right merrily, two staves,
Sung to the praise and glory of King George! —
Man praises man; and Garrick's memory next,

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When time hath somewhat mellow'd it, and made
The idol of our worship while he lived
The god of our idolatry once more,
Shall have its altar; and the world shall go
In pilgrimage to bow before its shrine.
The theatre, too small, shall suffocate
Its squeezed contents, and more than it admits
Shall sigh at their exclusion, and return
Ungratified: for there some noble lord
Shall stuff his shoulders with King Richard's bunch,
Or wrap himself in Hamlet's inky cloak,
And strut, and storm, and straddle, stamp and stare,
To shew the world how Garrick did not act.
For Garrick was a worshipper himself;
He drew the liturgy, and framed the rites
And solemn ceremonial of the day,
And call'd the world to worship on the banks
Of Avon, famed in song. Ah, pleasant proof
That piety has still in human hearts
Some place, a spark or two not yet extinct.
The mulberry tree was hung with blooming wreaths;
The mulberry tree stood centre of the dance;
The mulberry tree was hymn'd with dulcet airs;
And from his touchwood trunk the mulberry tree
Supplied such relics as devotion holds
Still sacred, and preserves with pious care.
So 'twas a hallow'd time: decorum reign'd,
And mirth without offence. No few return'd,
Doubtless, much edified, and all refresh'd.*
Man praises man. The rabble, all alive
From tippling benches, cellars, stalls, and sties,
Swarm in the streets. The statesman of the day,
A pompous and slow-moving pageant, comes.
Some shout him, and some hang upon his car,
To gaze in 's eyes, and bless him. Maidens wave
Their kerchiefs, and old women weep for joy:
While others, not so satisfied, unhorse
The gilded equipage, and, turning loose
His steeds, usurp a place they well deserve.

* The poet here alludes to the Shakespeare jubilee, in which Garrick was the chief *actor*.

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Why? what has charm'd them? Hath he saved the state?
No. Doth he purpose its salvation? No.
Enchanting novelty, that moon at full,
That finds out every crevice of the head
That is not sound and perfect, hath in theirs
Wrought this disturbance. But the wane is near,
And his own cattle must suffice him soon.
Thus idly do we waste the breath of praise,
And dedicate a tribute, in its use
And just direction sacred, to a thing
Doom'd to the dust, or lodged already there.
Encomium in old time was poets' work;
But poets, having lavishly long since
Exhausted all materials of the art,
The task now falls into the public hand;
And I, contented with an humbler theme,
Have pour'd my stream of panegyric down
The vale of Nature, where it creeps, and winds
Among her lovely works with a secure
And unambitious course, reflecting clear,
If not the virtues, yet the worth of brutes.
And I am recompensed, and deem the toils
Of poetry not lost, if verse of mine
May stand between an animal and wo,
And teach one tyrant pity for his drudge.
  The groans of Nature in this nether world,
Which Heaven has heard for ages, have an end.
Foretold by prophets, and by poets sung,
Whose fire was kindled at the prophets' lamp,
The time of rest, the promised sabbath, comes.
Six thousand years of sorrow have well-nigh
Fulfill'd their tardy and disastrous course
Over a sinful world; and what remains
Of this tempestuous state of human things
Is merely as the working of a sea
Before a calm, that rocks itself to rest:
For He, whose car the winds are, and the clouds
The dust that waits upon his sultry march,
When sin hath moved Him, and his wrath is hot,
Shall visit earth in mercy; shall descend
Propitious in his chariot paved with love;

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And what His storms have blasted and defaced
For man's revolt, shall with a smile repair.
Sweet is the harp of prophecy; too sweet
Not to be wrong'd by a mere mortal touch:
Nor can the wonders it records be sung
To meaner music, and not suffer loss.
But when a poet, or when one like me,
Happy to rove among poetic flowers,
Though poor in skill to rear them, lights at last
On some fair theme, some theme divinely fair,
Such is the impulse and the spur he feels
To give it praise proportion'd to its worth,
That not to attempt it, arduous as he deems
The labour, were a task more arduous still.
O scenes surpassing fable, and yet true,
Scenes of accomplish'd bliss! which who can see,
Though but in distant prospect, and not feel
His soul refresh'd with foretaste of the joy?
Rivers of gladness water all the earth,
And clothe all climes with beauty; the reproach
Of barrenness is past. The fruitful field
Laughs with abundance; and the land, once lean,
Or fertile only in its own disgrace,
Exults to see its thistly curse repeal'd.
The various seasons woven into one,
And that one season an eternal spring,
The garden fears no blight, and needs no fence,
For there is none to covet,—all are full.
The lion, and the libbard, and the bear,
Graze with the fearless flocks; all bask at noon
Together, or all gambol in the shade
Of the same grove, and drink one common stream.
Antipathies are none. No foe to man
Lurks in the serpent now: the mother sees,
And smiles to see, her infant's playful hand
Stretch'd forth to dally with the crested worm,
To stroke his azure neck, or to receive
The lambent homage of his arrowy tongue.
All creatures worship man, and all mankind
One Lord, one Father. Error has no place:
That creeping pestilence is driven away;

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The breath of Heaven has chased it. In the heart
No passion touches a discordant string,
But all is harmony and love. Disease
Is not: the pure and uncontaminate blood
Holds its due course, nor fears the frost of age.
One song employs all nations; and all cry,
"Worthy the Lamb, for He was slain for us!"
The dwellers in the vales and on the rocks
Shout to each other, and the mountain tops
From distant mountains catch the flying joy,
Till, nation after nation taught the strain,
Earth rolls the rapturous hosanna round.
Behold the measure of the promise fill'd;
See Salem built, the labour of a God!
Bright as a sun the sacred city shines;
All kingdoms and all princes of the earth
Flock to that light; the glory of all lands
Flows into her; unbounded is her joy,
And endless her increase. Thy rams are there,
Nebaioth, and the flocks of Kedar there: *
The looms of Ormus, and the mines of Ind,
And Saba's spicy groves, pay tribute there.
Praise is in all her gates: upon her walls,
And in her streets, and in her spacious courts
Is heard salvation. Eastern Java there
Kneels with the native of the farthest west;
And Ethiopia spreads abroad the hand,
And worships. Her report has travell'd forth
Into all lands. From every clime they come
To see thy beauty, and to share thy joy,
O Sion! an assembly such as earth
Saw never, such as heaven stoops down to see.
Thus heavenward all things tend. For all were once
Perfect, and all must be at length restored.
So God hath greatly purposed; who would else
In his dishonour'd works himself endure
Dishonour, and be wrong'd without redress.

* Nebaioth and Kedar, the sons of Ishmael, and progenitors of the Arabs, in the prophetic scripture here alluded to, may be reasonably considered as representatives of the Gentiles at large. —*Author's Note.*

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Haste, then, and wheel away a shatter'd world,
Ye slow-revolving seasons! we would see
(A sight to which our eyes are strangers yet)
A world that does not dread and hate his laws,
And suffer for its crime; would learn how fair
The creature is that God pronounces good,
How pleasant in itself what pleases Him.
Here every drop of honey hides a sting;
Worms wind themselves into our sweetest flowers;
And even the joy that haply some poor heart
Derives from heaven, pure as the fountain is,
Is sullied in the stream, taking a taint
From touch of human lips, at best impure.
Oh for a world in principle as chaste
As this is gross and selfish! over which
Custom and prejudice shall bear no sway,
That govern all things here, shouldering aside
The meek and modest truth, and forcing her
To seek a refuge from the tongue of strife
In nooks obscure, far from the ways of men:
Where violence shall never lift the sword,
Nor cunning justify the proud man's wrong,
Leaving the poor no remedy but tears:
Where he that fills an office shall esteem
The occasion it presents of doing good
More than the perquisite: where law shall speak
Seldom, and never but as wisdom prompts
And equity; not jealous more to guard
A worthless form than to decide aright:
Where fashion shall not sanctify abuse,
Nor smooth good-breeding (supplemental grace)
With lean performance ape the work of love.

Come, then, and, added to thy many crowns,
Receive yet one, the crown of all the earth,
Thou who alone art worthy! It was thine
By ancient covenant, ere Nature's birth;
And thou hast made it thine by purchase since,
And overpaid its value with thy blood.
Thy saints proclaim thee King! and in their hearts
Thy title is engraven with a pen
Dipp'd in the fountain of eternal love.

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Thy saints proclaim thee King; and thy delay
Gives courage to their foes, who, could they see
The dawn of thy last advent, long desired,
Would creep into the bowels of the hills,
And flee for safety to the falling rocks.
The very spirit of the world is tired
Of its own taunting question, ask'd so long,
"Where is the promise of your Lord's approach?"
The infidel has shot his bolts away,
Till, his exhausted quiver yielding none,
He gleans the blunted shafts, that have recoil'd,
And aims them at the shield of truth again.
The veil is rent, rent too by priestly hands,
That hides divinity from mortal eyes;
And all the mysteries to faith proposed,
Insulted and traduced, are cast aside,
As useless, to the moles and to the bats.
They now are deem'd the faithful, and are praised,
Who, constant only in rejecting thee,
Deny thy Godhead with a martyr's zeal,
And quit their office for their error's sake.
Blind, and in love with darkness! yet even these
Worthy, compared with sycophants, who knee
Thy name adoring, and then preach thee man!
So fares thy church. But how thy church may fare
The world takes little thought. Who will may preach,
And what they will. All pastors are alike
To wandering sheep, resolved to follow none.
Two gods divide them all,—pleasure and gain:
For these they live, they sacrifice to these,
And in their service wage perpetual war
With conscience and with thee. Lust in their hearts,
And mischief in their hands, they roam the earth
To prey upon each other; stubborn, fierce,
High-minded, foaming out their own disgrace.
Thy prophets speak of such; and, noting down
The features of the last degenerate times,
Exhibit every lineament of these.
Come, then, and, added to thy many crowns,
Receive yet one as radiant as the rest,

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Due to thy last and most effectual work,
Thy word fulfill'd, the conquest of a world.
He is the happy man, whose life even now
Shews somewhat of that happier life to come;
Who, doom'd to an obscure but tranquil state,
Is pleased with it, and, were he free to choose,
Would make his fate his choice; whom peace, the fruit
Of virtue, and whom virtue, fruit of faith,
Prepare for happiness; bespeak him one
Content indeed to sojourn while he must
Below the skies, but having there his home.
The world o'erlooks him in her busy search
Of objects more illustrious in her view;
And occupied as earnestly as she,
Though more sublimely, he o'erlooks the world.
She scorns his pleasures, for she knows them not;
He seeks not hers, for he has proved them vain.
He cannot skim the ground like summer birds
Pursuing gilded flies,—and such he deems
Her honours, her emoluments, her joys.
Therefore in contemplation is his bliss,
Whose power is such, that whom she lifts from earth
She makes familiar with a heaven unseen,
And shews him glories yet to be reveal'd.
Not slothful he, though seeming unemploy'd,
And censured oft as useless. Stillest streams
Oft water fairest meadows, and the bird
That flutters least is longest on the wing.
Ask him, indeed, what trophies he has raised,
Or what achievements of immortal fame
He purposes, and he shall answer—None.
His warfare is within. There unfatigued
His fervent spirit labours. There he fights,
And there obtains fresh triumphs o'er himself,
And never-withering wreaths, compared with which
The laurels that a Cæsar reaps are weeds.
Perhaps the self-approving haughty world,
That as she sweeps him with her whistling silks
Scarce deigns to notice him, or, if she see,
Deems him a cipher in the works of God,

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Receives advantage from his noiseless hours,
Of which she little dreams. Perhaps she owes
Her sunshine and her rain, her blooming spring
And plenteous harvest, to the prayer he makes,
When, Isaac like, the solitary saint
Walks forth to meditate at eventide,
And think on her, who thinks not for herself.
Forgive him, then, thou bustler in concerns
Of little worth, an idler in the best,
If, author of no mischief and some good,
He seek his proper happiness by means
That may advance, but cannot hinder, thine.
Nor, though he tread the secret path of life,
Engage no notice and enjoy much ease,
Account him an encumbrance on the state,
Receiving benefits, and rendering none.
His sphere though humble, if that humble sphere
Shine with his fair example, and though small
His influence, if that influence all be spent
In soothing sorrow, and in quenching strife,
In aiding helpless indigence, in works,
From which at least a grateful few derive
Some taste of comfort in a world of wo;
Then let the supercilious great confess
He serves his country, recompenses well
The state, beneath the shadow of whose vine
He sits secure, and in the scale of life
Holds no ignoble, though a slighted, place.
The man, whose virtues are more felt than seen,
Must drop indeed the hope of public praise;
But he may boast, what few that win it can,
That, if his country stand not by his skill,
At least his follies have not wrought her fall.
Polite Refinement offers him in vain
Her golden tube, through which a sensual world
Draws gross impurity, and likes it well,
The neat conveyance hiding all th' offence.
Not that he peevishly rejects a mode
Because that world adopts it. If it bear
The stamp and clear impression of good sense,
And be not costly more than of true worth,

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He puts it on, and for decorum sake
Can wear it e'en as gracefully as she.
She judges of refinement by the eye,
He by the test of conscience, and a heart
Not soon deceived; aware that what is base
No polish can make sterling; and that vice,
Though well perfumed, and elegantly dress'd,
Like an unburied carcass trick'd with flowers,
Is but a garnish'd nuisance, fitter far
For cleanly riddance than for fair attire.
So life glides smoothly and by stealth away,
More golden than that age of fabled gold
Renown'd in ancient song; not vex'd with care
Or stain'd with guilt, beneficent, approved
Of God and man, and peaceful in its end.
So glide my life away, and so at last,
My share of duties decently fulfill'd,
May some disease, not tardy to perform
Its destined office, yet with gentle stroke,
Dismiss me weary to a safe retreat,
Beneath the turf that I have often trod.
It shall not grieve me then, that once, when call'd
To dress a SOFA with the flowers of verse,
I play'd a while, obedient to the fair,
With that light task; but soon, to please her more,
Whom flowers alone I knew would little please,
Let fall the unfinish'd wreath, and roved for fruit;
Roved far, and gather'd much: some harsh, 'tis true,
Pick'd from the thorns and briers of reproof,
But wholesome, well-digested; grateful some
To palates that can taste immortal truth,
Insipid else, and sure to be despised.
But all is in His hand whose praise I seek.
In vain the poet sings, and the world hears,
If He regard not, though divine the theme.
'Tis not in artful measures, in the chime
And idle tinkling of a minstrel's lyre,
To charm His ear, whose eye is on the heart;
Whose frown can disappoint the proudest strain,
Whose approbation—prosper even mine.

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TIROCINIUM.

The idea of this poem, which was completed in November, 1784, Cowper appears to have first entertained while corresponding on the subject of education with Unwin, to whom it was dedicated in these terms:—"To the Rev. William Cawthorne Unwin, Rector of Stock, in Essex, the tutor of his two sons, the following poem, recommending private tuition in preference to an education at school, is inscribed by his affectionate friend, William Cowper." In the dedication, as originally written, the words, "and of his two sons only," occurred, but were suppressed, though with some reluctance, by the poet, who acknowledges his fears lest, without such insertion, the poem might be regarded as "an interested recommendation of a friend's boarding establishment." To neither of the requisites for writing on practical education—freedom from prejudice and enlightened experience—could Cowper lay claim. From his earliest infancy he suffered under a temperament which unfitted him for the active scenes of life; and that which was merely personal in his case, he makes incidental to the system. What to most other boys is a mere passing unhappiness, a momentary cloud on the sun of their joyous hours, and leaving not a trace upon the memory of the man, settled down in his recollection into rooted antipathy. His actual acquaintance also with public education in England, was, for a professional man, singularly imperfect. Save Westminster, he knew nothing of any seminary of eminence. Of the universities which he censures so freely, he possessed, beyond hearsay, absolutely no information. Accordingly, as a didactic treatise, the "Review of Schools" is a failure; while, as a poem, it displeases by unpoetical sentiments, exhibiting Cowper's peculiarities of genius and manner to the greatest disadvantage. The occasional carelessness of his language and versification, which, in his other works, supported by natural sentiment, assumes the semblance of a graceful negligence, becomes here harshness and obscurity. On the other hand, a general, even painful elaboration of the whole takes away much of

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the wonted airiness and freedom of his effects. As a satirist, he displays here more than infelicity in the application of his censure. The imputed vices of students are reprehended in language which it would be indecent to read in the hearing of youth: teachers are absurdly and meanly blamed for selling their instructions; and parents are accused of sending their children to public schools from motives of personal caprice, or the mercenary hope of their contracting advantageous friendships. On the main question discussed,—the relative advantages of public and private education,—it is sufficient that utility and experience have long since determined it in favour of the system of education which trains the boy for the active concerns of the world where the man is to play a part. Besides, Cowper does not even attempt to make good his abuse of public schools: he gravely assumes, instead of proving the points at issue. True, at a public school a boy may learn some vices which he might not have witnessed at home; but his heart, his morals, and his understanding will be more debased by one day's familiarity with the menials of his father's house or stable, than by years of such intimacies as he is likely to form among his equals at a public seminary.

Notwithstanding these defects, the work was a favourite with the writer; and he has prefixed to it the longest, and the only laboured, preface which he ever wrote. "In the poem on Education, he (the author) would be very sorry to stand suspected of having aimed his censure at any particular school. His objections are such as naturally apply themselves to schools in general. If there were not, as for the most part there is, wilful neglect in those who manage them, and an omission even of such discipline as they are susceptible of, the objects are yet too numerous for minute attention; and the aching hearts of ten thousand parents, mourning under the bitterest of all disappointments, attest the truth of the allegation. His quarrel, therefore, is with the mischief at large, and not with any particular instance of it." But whatever objections may be urged against the doctrines of the poem, all must willingly and with pleasure confess that there are passages of great beauty and pathos, where domestic scenes and domestic affections are described.

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TIROCINIUM;

OR,

A REVIEW OF SCHOOLS.

Κεφαλαιον δη παιδειας ορθη τροφη. PLATO.

The mind is the true object of instruction.

Αρχη πολιτειας απασης νεων τροφα. DIOG. LAERT.

The education of youth is the foundation of all civil government.

It is not from his form, in which we trace
Strength join'd with beauty, dignity with grace,
That man, the master of this globe, derives
His right of empire over all that lives.
That form, indeed, the associate of a mind
Vast in its powers, ethereal in its kind,
That form, the labour of almighty skill,
Framed for the service of a freeborn will,
Asserts precedence, and bespeaks control,
But borrows all its grandeur from the soul:
Her's is the state, the splendour, and the throne,
An intellectual kingdom, all her own.
For her the memory fills her ample page
With truths pour'd down from every distant age;
For her amasses an unbounded store,
The wisdom of great nations, now no more;
Though laden, not encumber'd with her spoil;
Laborious, yet unconscious of her toil;

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When copiously supplied, then most enlarged
Still to be fed, and not to be surcharged.
For her the fancy, roving unconfined,
The present muse of every pensive mind,
Works magic wonders, adds a brighter hue
To Nature's scenes than Nature ever knew.
At her command winds rise, and waters roar,
Again she lays them slumbering on the shore;
With flower and fruit the wilderness supplies,
Or bids the rocks in ruder pomp arise.
For her the judgment, umpire in the strife,
That grace and nature have to wage through life
Quick-sighted arbiter of good and ill,
Appointed sage preceptor to the will,
Condemns, approves, and with a faithful voice
Guides the decision of a doubtful choice.
  Why did the fiat of a God give birth
To yon fair sun, and his attendant earth?
And when, descending, he resigns the skies,
Why takes the gentler moon her turn to rise,
Whom ocean feels through all his countless waves,
And owns her power on every shore he laves?
Why do the seasons still enrich the year,
Fruitful and young as in their first career?
Spring hangs her infant blossoms on the trees,
Rock'd in the cradle of the western breeze;
Summer in haste the thriving charge receives
Beneath the shade of her expanded leaves,
Till Autumn's fiercer heats and plenteous dews
Dye them at last in all their glowing hues.
'Twere wild profusion all, and bootless waste,
Power misemploy'd, munificence misplaced,
Had not its Author dignified the plan,
And crown'd it with the majesty of man.
Thus form'd, thus placed, intelligent, and taught,
Look where he will, the wonders God has wrought,
The wildest scorner of his Maker's laws
Finds in a sober moment time to pause,
To press the important question on his heart,
"Why form'd at all, and wherefore as thou art?"

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If man be what he seems, this hour a slave,
The next mere dust and ashes in the grave;
Endued with reason only to descry
His crimes and follies with an aching eye;
With passions, just that he may prove, with pain,
The force he spends against their fury vain;
And if, soon after, having burnt, by turns,
With every lust with which frail Nature burns,
His being end, where death dissolves the bond,
The tomb take all, and all be blank beyond;
Then he, of all that Nature has brought forth,
Stands self-impeach'd the creature of least worth,
And useless while he lives, and when he dies,
Brings into doubt the Wisdom of the skies.
  Truths, that the learn'd pursue with eager thought,
Are not important always as dear-bought,
Proving at last, though told in pompous strains,
A childish waste of philosophic pains;
But truths, on which depends our main concern,
That 'tis our shame and misery not to learn,
Shine by the side of every path we tread
With such a lustre, he that runs may read.
'Tis true that, if to trifle life away
Down to the sunset of their latest day,
Then perish on futurity's wide shore
Like fleeting exhalations, found no more,
Were all that Heaven required of humankind,
And all the plan their destiny design'd,
What none could reverence all might justly blame,
And man would breathe but for his Maker's shame.
But reason heard, and Nature well perused,
At once the dreaming mind is disabused.
If all we find possessing earth, sea, air,
Reflect His attributes, who placed them there,
Fulfil the purpose, and appear design'd
Proofs of the wisdom of the all-seeing mind,
'Tis plain the creature, whom he chose to invest
With kingship and dominion o'er the rest,
Received his nobler nature, and was made
Fit for the power, in which he stands array'd;

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That first or last, hereafter if not here,
He too might make his Author's wisdom clear,
Praise Him on earth, or, obstinately dumb,
Suffer his justice in a world to come.
This once believed, 'twere logic misapplied
To prove a consequence by none denied,
That we are bound to cast the minds of youth
Betimes into the mould of heavenly truth,
That, taught of God, they may indeed be wise,
Nor, ignorantly wandering, miss the skies.
  In early days the conscience has in most
A quickness, which in later life is lost;
Preserved from guilt by salutary fears,
Or, guilty, soon relenting into tears.
Too careless often, as our years proceed,
What friends we sort with, or what books we read,
Our parents yet exert a prudent care
To feed our infant minds with proper fare;
And wisely store the nursery by degrees
With wholesome learning, yet acquired with ease.
Neatly secured from being soil'd or torn
Beneath a pane of thin translucent horn,
A book (to please us at a tender age
'Tis call'd a book, though but a single page)
Presents the prayer the Saviour deign'd to teach,
Which children use, and parsons—when they preach.
Lisping our syllables, we scramble next
Through moral narrative, or sacred text;
And learn with wonder how this world began,
Who made, who marr'd, and who has ransom'd man:
Points which, unless the Scripture made them plain,
The wisest heads might agitate in vain.
O thou, whom, borne on fancy's eager wing
Back to the season of life's happy spring,
I pleased remember, and, while memory yet
Holds fast her office here, can ne'er forget;
Ingenious dreamer, in whose well-told tale
Sweet fiction and sweet truth alike prevail;
Whose humorous vein, strong sense, and simple style,
May teach the gayest, make the gravest smile;

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Witty, and well employ'd, and like thy Lord,
Speaking in parables his slighted word;
I name thee not, lest so despised a name
Should move a sneer at thy deserved fame;
Yet even in transitory life's late day,
That mingles all my brown with sober gray,
Revere the man, whose Pilgrim marks the road,
And guides the Progress of the soul to God.
'Twere well with most, if books, that could engage
Their childhood, pleased them at a riper age;
The man, approving what had charm'd the boy,
Would die at last in comfort, peace, and joy;
And not with curses on his heart, who stole
The gem of truth from his unguarded soul.
The stamp of artless piety impress'd
By kind tuition on his yielding breast,
The youth, now bearded, and yet pert and raw,
Regards with scorn, though once received with awe;
And, warp'd into the labyrinth of lies,
That babblers, call'd philosophers, devise,
Blasphemes his creed as founded on a plan
Replete with dreams, unworthy of a man.
Touch but his nature in its ailing part,
Assert the native evil of his heart,
His pride resents the charge, although the proof*
Rise in his forehead, and seem rank enough:
Point to the cure, describe a Saviour's cross
As God's expedient to retrieve his loss,
The young apostate sickens at the view,
And hates it with the malice of a Jew.
How weak the barrier of mere Nature proves,
Opposed against the pleasures Nature loves!
While self-betray'd, and wilfully undone,
She longs to yield, no sooner woo'd than won.
Try now the merits of this blest exchange
Of modest truth for wit's eccentric range.
Time was, he closed as he began the day
With decent duty, not ashamed to pray:

* See 2 Chron. ch. xxvi. ver. 19.—*Author.*

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The practice was a bond upon his heart,
A pledge he gave for a consistent part;
Nor could he dare presumptuously displease
A power, confess'd so lately on his knees.
But now farewell all legendary tales,
The shadows fly, philosophy prevails;
Prayer to the winds, and caution to the waves,
Religion makes the free by nature—slaves;
Priests have invented, and the world admired,
What knavish priests promulgate as inspired,
Till reason, now no longer overawed,
Resumes her powers, and spurns the clumsy fraud;
And common sense diffusing real day,
The meteor of the Gospel dies away
Such rhapsodies our shrewd discerning youth
Learn from expert inquirers after truth;
Whose only care, might truth presume to speak,
Is not to find what they profess to seek.
And thus, well tutor'd only while we share
A mother's lectures and a nurse's care;
And taught at schools much mythologic stuff,*
But sound religion sparingly enough;
Our early notices of truth, disgraced,
Soon lose their credit, and are all effaced.
Would you your son should be a sot or dunce,
Lascivious, headstrong, or all these at once;
That in good time the stripling's finish'd taste
For loose expense and fashionable waste,
Should prove your ruin, and his own at last;
Train him in public with a mob of boys,
Childish in mischief only and in noise,
Else of a mannish growth, and five in ten
In infidelity and lewdness men.
There shall he learn, ere sixteen winters old,
That authors are most useful pawn'd or sold;

* The author begs leave to explain. Sensible that, without such knowledge, neither the ancient poets nor historians can be tasted, or indeed understood, he does not mean to censure the pains that are taken to instruct a schoolboy in the religion of the Heathen, but merely that neglect of Christian culture which leaves him shamefully ignorant of his own.

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That pedantry is all that schools impart,
But taverns teach the knowledge of the heart;
There waiter Dick, with Bacchanalian lays,
Shall win his heart, and have his drunken praise,
His counsellor and bosom friend shall prove,
And some street-pacing harlot his first love.
Schools, unless discipline were doubly strong,
Detain their adolescent charge too long;
The management of tiros of eighteen
Is difficult; their punishment obscene.
The stout tall captain, whose superior size
The minor heroes view with envious eyes,
Becomes their pattern, upon whom they fix
Their whole attention, and ape all his tricks.
His pride, that scorns to obey or to submit,
With them is courage; his effrontery wit.
His wild excursions, window-breaking feats,
Robbery of gardens, quarrels in the streets,
His hairbreadth 'scapes, and all his daring schemes,
Transport them, and are made their favourite themes.
In little bosoms, such achievements strike
A kindred spark; they burn to do the like.
Thus, half accomplish'd ere he yet begin
To shew the peeping down upon his chin;
And, as maturity of years comes on,
Made just the adept that you design'd your son;
To ensure the perseverance of his course,
And give your monstrous project all its force,
Send him to college. If he there be tamed,
Or in one article of vice reclaim'd,
Where no regard of ord'nances is shewn
Or look'd for now, the fault must be his own.
Some sneaking virtue lurks in him, no doubt,
Where neither strumpets' charms, nor drinking-bout,
Nor gambling practices, can find it out.
Such youths of spirit, and that spirit too,
Ye nurseries of our boys, we owe to you:
Though from ourselves the mischief more proceeds,
For public schools 'tis public folly feeds.
The slaves of custom and establish'd mode,
With packhorse constancy we keep the road,

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Crooked or straight, through quags or thorny dells,
True to the jingling of our leader's bells.
To follow foolish precedents, and wink
With both our eyes, is easier than to think;
And such an age as ours balks no expense,
Except of caution, and of common sense;
Else, sure, notorious fact, and proof so plain,
Would turn our steps into a wiser train.
I blame not those, who with what care they can
O'erwatch the numerous and unruly clan;
Or, if I blame, 'tis only that they dare
Promise a work, of which they must despair.
Have ye, ye sage intendants of the whole,
An ubiquarian presence and control,
Elisha's eye, that, when Gehazi stray'd,
Went with him, and saw all the game he play'd?
Yes — ye are conscious; and on all the shelves
Your pupils strike upon, have struck yourselves.
Or if, by nature sober, ye had then,
Boys as ye were, the gravity of men,
Ye knew at least, by constant proofs address'd
To ears and eyes, the vices of the rest.
But ye connive at what ye cannot cure,
And evils, not to be endured, endure,
Lest power exerted, but without success,
Should make the little ye retain still less.
Ye once were justly famed for bringing forth
Undoubted scholarship and genuine worth,
And in the firmament of fame still shines
A glory, bright as that of all the signs,
Of poets raised by you, and statesmen, and divines.
Peace to them all! those brilliant times are fled,
And no such lights are kindling in their stead.
Our striplings shine, indeed, but with such rays
As set the midnight riot in a blaze;
And seem, if judged by their expressive looks,
Deeper in none than in their surgeon's books.
  Say, muse (for, education made the song,
No muse can hesitate, or linger long)
What causes move us, knowing as we must
That these *menageries* all fail their trust,

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To send our sons to scout and scamper there,
While colts and puppies cost us so much care?
  Be it a weakness, it deserves some praise,
We love the playplace of our early days;
The scene is touching, and the heart is stone
That feels not at that sight, and feels at none.
The wall on which we tried our graving skill,
The very name we carved subsisting still,
The bench on which we sat while deep employ'd,
Though mangled, hack'd, and hew'd, not yet destroy'd;
The little ones, unbutton'd, glowing hot,
Playing our games, and on the very spot,
As happy as we once, to kneel and draw
The chalky ring, and knuckle down at taw,
To pitch the ball into the grounded hat,
Or drive it devious with a dexterous pat;
The pleasing spectacle at once excites
Such recollection of our own delights,
That viewing it, we seem almost to obtain
Our innocent sweet simple years again.
This fond attachment to the well-known place,
Whence first we started into life's long race,
Maintains its hold with such unfailing sway,
We feel it even in age, and at our latest day.
Hark! how the sire of chits, whose future share
Of classic food begins to be his care,
With his own likeness placed on either knee,
Indulges all a father's heart-felt glee,
And tells them, as he strokes their silver locks,
That they must soon learn Latin, and to box;
Then turning, he regales his listening wife
With all the adventures of his early life,
His skill in coachmanship, or driving chaise,
In bilking tavern bills, and spouting plays,
What shifts he used, detected in a scrape,
How he was flogg'd, or had the luck to escape,
What sums he lost at play, and how he sold
Watch, seals, and all—till all his pranks are told.
Retracing thus his *frolics* ('tis a name
That palliates deeds of folly and of shame)

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He gives the local bias all its sway,
Resolves that where he play'd his sons shall play,
And destines their bright genius to be shown
Just in the scene where he display'd his own.
The meek and bashful boy will soon be taught
To be as bold and forward as he ought,
The rude will scuffle through with ease enough,
Great schools suit best the sturdy and the rough.
Ah, happy designation, prudent choice,
The event is sure; expect it, and rejoice!
Soon see your wish fulfill'd in either child,
The pert made perter, and the tame made wild.*
The great, indeed, by titles, riches, birth,
Excused the encumbrance of more solid worth,
Are best disposed of where with most success
They may acquire that confident address,
Those habits of profuse and lewd expense,
That scorn of all delights but those of sense,
Which, though in plain plebeians we condemn,
With so much reason all expect from them.
But families of less illustrious fame,
Whose chief distinction is their spotless name,
Whose heirs, their honours none, their income small,
Must shine by true desert or not at all,
What dream they of, that with so little care
They risk their hopes, their dearest treasure, there?
They dream of little Charles or William graced
With wig prolix, down flowing to his waist;
They see the attentive crowds his talents draw,
They hear him speak—the oracle of law.
The father, who designs his babe a priest,
Dreams him episcopally such at least,
And while the playful jockey scours the room
Briskly, astride upon the parlour broom,
In fancy sees him more superbly ride
In coach with purple lined, and mitres on its side.

* The principles of the reasoning, as respects our attachment to early scenes, are naturally and beautifully evolved; but the inference is erroneous—a mere begging of the question.

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Events improbable and strange as these,
Which only a parental eye foresees,
A public school shall bring to pass with ease.
But how—resides such virtue in that air
As must create an appetite for prayer?
And will it breathe into him all the zeal,
That candidates for such a prize should feel,
To take the lead, and be the foremost still
In all true worth and literary skill?
" Ah blind to bright futurity, untaught
The knowledge of the world, and dull of thought!
Church-ladders are not always mounted best
By learned clerks, and Latinists profess'd.
The exalted prize demands an upward look,
Not to be found by poring on a book.
Small skill in Latin, and still less in Greek,
Is more than adequate to all I seek;
Let erudition grace him, or not grace,
I give the bauble but the second place;
His wealth, fame, honours, all that I intend,
Subsist and centre in one point,—a friend.
A friend, whate'er he studies or neglects,
Shall give him consequence, heal all defects.
His intercourse with peers and sons of peers—
There dawns the splendour of his future years;
In that bright quarter his propitious skies
Shall blush betimes, and there his glory rise.
Your Lordship, and *Your Grace!* what school can teach
A rhetoric equal to those parts of speech?
What need of Homer's verse, or Tully's prose,
Sweet interjections! if he learn but those?
Let reverend churls his ignorance rebuke,
Who starve upon a dog's-ear'd Pentateuch,
The parson knows enough who knows a Duke."
Egregious purpose! worthily begun
In barbarous prostitution of your son;
Press'd on *his* part by means that would disgrace
A scrivener's clerk, or footman out of place,
And ending, if at last its end be gain'd,
In sacrilege, in God's own house profaned.

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It may succeed; and, if his sins should call
For more than common punishment, it shall;
The wretch shall rise, and be the thing on earth
Least qualified in honour, learning, worth,
To occupy a sacred, awful post,
In which the best and worthiest tremble most.
The *royal letters* are a thing of course,
A king, that would, might recommend his horse;
And deans, no doubt, and chapters, with one voice,
As bound in duty, would confirm the choice.
Behold your bishop! well he plays his part,
Christian in name, and infidel in heart,
Ghostly in office, earthly in his plan,
A slave at court, elsewhere a lady's man.
Dumb as a senator, and as a priest
A piece of mere church furniture at best;
To live estranged from God his total scope,
And his end sure, without one glimpse of hope.
But fair although and feasible it seem,
Depend not much upon your golden dream;
For Providence, that seems concern'd to exempt
The hallow'd bench from absolute contempt,
In spite of all the wrigglers into place,
Still keeps a seat or two for worth and grace;
And therefore 'tis, that, though the sight be rare,
We sometimes see a Lowth or Bagot there.
Besides, school friendships are not always found,
Though fair in promise, permanent, and sound;
The most disinterested and virtuous minds,
In early years connected, time unbinds;
New situations give a different cast
Of habit, inclination, temper, taste,
And he, that seem'd our counterpart at first,
Soon shews the strong similitude reversed.
Young heads are giddy, and young hearts are warm,
And make mistakes for manhood to reform.
Boys are at best but pretty buds unblown,
Whose scent and hues are rather guess'd than known;
Each dreams that each is just what he appears,
But learns his error in maturer years,

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When disposition, like a sail unfurl'd,
Shews all its rents and patches to the world.
If, therefore, e'en when honest in design,
A boyish friendship may so soon decline,
'Twere wiser sure to inspire a little heart
With just abhorrence of so mean a part,
Than set your son to work at a vile trade
For wages so unlikely to be paid.

Our public hives of puerile resort,
That are of chief and most approved report,
To such base hopes, in many a sordid soul,
Owe their repute in part, but not the whole.
A principle, whose proud pretensions pass
Unquestion'd, though the jewel be but glass—
That with a world, not often over nice,
Ranks as a virtue, and is yet a vice,
Or rather a gross compound, justly tried,
Of envy, hatred, jealousy, and pride—
Contributes most perhaps to enhance their fame;
And Emulation is its specious name.
Boys, once on fire with that contentious zeal,
Feel all the rage that female rivals feel;
The prize of beauty in a woman's eyes
Not brighter than in theirs the scholar's prize.
The spirit of that competition burns
With all varieties of ill by turns;
Each vainly magnifies his own success,
Resents his fellow's, wishes it were less,
Exults in his miscarriage, if he fail,
Deems his reward too great, if he prevail,
And labours to surpass him day and night,
Less for improvement than to tickle spite.
The spur is powerful, and I grant its force,
It pricks the genius forward in its course,
Allows short time for play, and none for sloth,
And, felt alike by each, advances both;
But judge, where so much evil intervenes,
The end, though plausible, not worth the means.
Weigh, for a moment, classical desert
Against a heart depraved and temper hurt;

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Hurt too perhaps for life; for early wrong,
Done to the nobler part, affects it long;
And you are stanch indeed in learning's cause,
If you can crown a discipline, that draws
Such mischiefs after it, with much applause.[1]
Connection form'd for interest, and endear'd
By selfish views, thus censured and cashier'd;
And emulation, as engendering hate,
Doom'd to a no less ignominious fate;
The props of such proud semininaries fall,
The Jachin and the Boaz of them all.
Great schools rejected, then, as those that swell
Beyond a size that can be managed well,
Shall royal institutions miss the bays,
And small academies win all the praise?
Force not my drift beyond its just intent,
I praise a school as Pope a government;
So take my judgment in his language dress'd,
"Whate'er is best administer'd is best."
Few boys are born with talents that excel,
But all are capable of living well;
Then ask not, Whether limited or large?
But, Watch they strictly, or neglect, their charge?
If anxious only that their boys may *learn*,
While *morals* languish a despised concern,
The great and small deserve one common blame,
Different in size, but in effect the same.
Much zeal in virtue's cause all teachers boast,
Though motives of mere lucre sway the most;
Therefore in towns and cities they abound,
For there the game they seek is easiest found;
Though there, in spite of all that care can do,
Traps to catch youth are most abundant too.
If shrewd, and of a well constructed brain,
Keen in pursuit, and vigorous to retain,
Your son come forth a prodigy of skill—
As wheresoever taught, so form'd, he will—
The pedagogue, with self-complacent air,
Claims more than half the praise as his due share:
But if, with all his genius, he betray,
Not more intelligent than loose and gay,

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Such vicious habits as disgrace his name,
Threaten his health, his fortune, and his fame;
Though want of due restraint alone have bred
The symptoms that you see with so much dread;
Unenvied there, he may sustain alone
The whole reproach, the fault was all his own.
Oh, 'tis a sight to be with joy perused,
By all whom sentiment has not abused—
New-fangled sentiment, the boasted grace
Of those who never feel in the right place—
A sight surpass'd by none that we can show,
Though Vestris on one leg still shine below,—
A father blest with an ingenuous son,
Father, and friend, and tutor, all in one.
How!—turn again to tales long since forgot,
Æsop, and Phædrus, and the rest?—Why not?
He will not blush, that has a father's heart,
To take in childish plays a childish part;
But bends his sturdy back to any toy
That youth takes pleasure in, to please his boy;
Then why resign into a stranger's hand
A task as much within your own command,
That God and Nature, and your interest too,
Seem with one voice to delegate to you?
Why hire a lodging in a house unknown
For one whose tenderest thoughts all hover round your own?
This second weaning, needless as it is,
How does it lacerate both your heart and his!
The indented stick, that loses day by day
Notch after notch, till all are smooth'd away,
Bears witness, long ere his dismission come,
With what intense desire he wants his home.
But though the joys he hopes beneath your roof
Bid fair enough to answer in the proof,
Harmless, and safe, and natural as they are,
A disappointment waits him even there:
Arrived, he feels an unexpected change,
He blushes, hangs his head, is shy and strange,
No longer takes, as once, with fearless ease,
His favourite stand between his father's knees,

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But seeks the corner of some distant seat,
And eyes the door, and watches a retreat,
And, least familiar where he should be most,
Feels all his happiest privileges lost.
Alas, poor boy!—the natural effect
Of love by absence chill'd into respect,
Say, what accomplishments, at school acquired,
Brings he, to sweeten fruits so undesired?
Thou well deserv'st an alienated son,
Unless thy conscious heart acknowledge—none;
None that, in thy domestic snug recess,
He had not made his own with more address,
Though some, perhaps, that shock thy feeling mind,
And better never learn'd, or left behind.
Add, too, that, thus estranged, thou canst obtain
By no kind arts his confidence again;
That here begins with most that long complaint
Of filial frankness lost, and love grown faint,
Which, oft neglected, in life's waning years
A parent pours into regardless ears.
  Like caterpillars, dangling under trees
By slender threads, and swinging in the breeze,
Which filthily bewray and sore disgrace
The boughs in which are bred the unseemly race;
While every worm industriously weaves
And winds his web about the rivell'd leaves;
So numerous are the follies that annoy
The mind and heart of every sprightly boy;
Imaginations noxious and perverse,
Which admonition can alone disperse.
The encroaching nuisance asks a faithful hand,
Patient, affectionate, of high command,
To check the procreation of a breed
Sure to exhaust the plant on which they feed.
'Tis not enough that Greek or Roman page,
At stated hours, his freakish thoughts engage;
Even in his pastimes he requires a friend,
To warn, and teach him safely to unbend;
O'er all his pleasures gently to preside,
Watch his emotions, and control their tide;

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And levying thus, and with an easy sway,
A tax of profit from his very play,
To impress a value, not to be erased,
On moments squander'd else, and running all to waste.
And seems it nothing in a father's eye,
That unimproved those many moments fly?
And is he well content his son should find
No nourishment to feed his growing mind
But conjugated verbs, and nouns declined?
For such is all the mental food purvey'd
By public hackneys in the schooling trade;
Who feed a pupil's intellect with store
Of syntax, truly, but with little more;
Dismiss their cares when they dismiss their flock,
Machines themselves, and govern'd by a clock.
Perhaps a father, blest with any brains,
Would deem it no abuse, or waste of pains,
To improve this diet, at no great expense,
With savoury truth and wholesome common sense;
To lead his son, for prospects of delight,
To some not steep, though philosophic, height,
Thence to exhibit to his wondering eyes
Yon circling worlds, their distance, and their size;
The moons of Jove, and Saturn's belted ball,
And the harmonious order of them all;
To shew him in an insect, or a flower,
Such microscopic proof of skill and power,
As, hid from ages past, God now displays,
To combat atheists with in modern days;
To spread the earth before him, and commend,
With designation of the finger's end,
Its various parts to his attentive note,
Thus bringing home to him the most remote;
To teach his heart to glow with generous flame,
Caught from the deeds of men of ancient fame:
And, more than all, with commendation due,
To set some living worthy in his view,
Whose fair example may at once inspire
A wish to copy what he must admire.
Such knowledge gain'd betimes, and which appears,
Though solid, not too weighty for his years,

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Sweet in itself, and not forbidding sport,
When health demands it, of athletic sort,
Would make him—what some lovely boys have been,
And more than one perhaps that I have seen—
An evidence and reprehension both
Of the mere schoolboy's lean and tardy growth.
  Art thou a man professionally tied,
With all thy faculties elsewhere applied,
Too busy to intend a meaner care,
Than how to enrich thyself, and next thine heir?
Or art thou (as, though rich, perhaps thou art)
But poor in knowledge, having none to impart?—
Behold that figure, neat, though plainly clad;
His sprightly mingled with a shade of sad;
Not of a nimble tongue, though now and then
Heard to articulate like other men;
No jester, and yet lively in discourse,
His phrase well chosen, clear, and full of force;
And his address, if not quite French in ease,
Not English stiff, but frank, and form'd to please;
Low in the world, because he scorns its arts;
A man of letters, manners, morals, parts;
Unpatronized, and therefore little known;
Wise for himself and his few friends alone—
In him thy well-appointed proxy see,
Arm'd for a work too difficult for thee;
Prepared by taste, by learning, and true worth,
To form thy son, to strike his genius forth;
Beneath thy roof, beneath thine eye, to prove
The force of discipline, when back'd by love;
To double all thy pleasure in thy child,
His mind inform'd, his morals undefiled.
Safe under such a wing, the boy shall show
No spots contracted among grooms below,
Nor taint his speech with meannesses, design'd
By footman Tom for witty and refined.
There, in his commerce with the liveried herd,
Lurks the contagion chiefly to be fear'd;
For since (so fashion dictates) all, who claim
A higher than a mere plebeian fame,

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Find it expedient, come what mischief may,
To entertain a thief or two in pay,
(And they that can afford the expense of more,
Some half a dozen, and some half a score,)
Great cause occurs, to save him from a band
So sure to spoil him, and so near at hand;
A point secured, if once he be supplied
With some such Mentor always at his side.
Are such men rare? perhaps they would abound,
Were occupation easier to be found,
Were education, else so sure to fail,
Conducted on a manageable scale,
And schools, that have outlived all just esteem,
Exchanged for the secure domestic scheme —
But, having found him, be thou duke or earl,
Shew thou hast sense enough to prize the pearl,
And, as thou wouldst the advancement of thine heir
In all good faculties beneath his care,
Respect, as is but rational and just,
A man deem'd worthy of so dear a trust.
Despised by thee, what more can he expect
From youthful folly than the same neglect;
A flat and fatal negative obtains
That instant upon all his future pains;
His lessons tire, his mild rebukes offend,
And all the instructions of thy son's best friend
Are a stream choked, or trickling to no end.
Doom him not then to solitary meals;
But recollect that he has sense, and feels;
And that, possessor of a soul refined,
An upright heart, and cultivated mind,
His post not mean, his talents not unknown,
He deems it hard to vegetate alone.
And, if admitted at thy board he sit,
Account him no just mark for idle wit;
Offend not him, whom modesty restrains
From repartee, with jokes that he disdains;
Much less transfix his feelings with an oath;
Nor frown unless he vanish with the cloth. —
And, trust me, his utility may reach
To more than he is hired or bound to teach;

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Much trash unutter'd, and some ills undone,
Through reverence of the censor of thy son.
  But, if thy table be indeed unclean,
Foul with excess, and with discourse obscene,
And thou a wretch, whom, following her old plan,
The world accounts an honourable man,
Because, forsooth, thy courage has been tried,
And stood the test, perhaps, on the wrong side,
Though thou hadst never grace enough to prove
That any thing but vice could win thy love—
Or hast thou a polite, card-playing wife,
Chain'd to the routs that she frequents for life;
Who, just when industry begins to snore,
Flies, wing'd with joy, to some coach-crowded door,
And thrice in every winter throngs thine own
With half the chariots and sedans in town,
Thyself meanwhile even shifting as thou may'st;
Not very sober though, nor very chaste—
Or is thine house, though less superb thy rank,
If not a scene of pleasure, a mere blank,
And thou at best, and in thy soberest mood,
A trifler vain, and empty of all good,—
Though mercy for thyself thou canst have none,
Hear Nature plead, shew mercy to thy son.
Saved from his home, where every day brings forth
Some mischief fatal to his future worth,
Find him a better in a distant spot,
Within some pious pastor's humble cot,
Where vile example (yours I chiefly mean,
The most seducing, and the oftenest seen)
May never more be stamp'd upon his breast,
Not yet perhaps incurably impress'd.
Where early rest makes early rising sure,
Disease or comes not, or finds easy cure,
Prevented much by diet neat and plain,
Or, if it enter, soon starved out again:
Where all the attention of his faithful host,
Discreetly limited to two at most,
May raise such fruits as shall reward his care,
And not at last evaporate in air:

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Where, stillness aiding study, and his mind
Serene, and to his duties much inclined,
Not occupied in day-dreams, as at home,
Of pleasures past, or follies yet to come,
His virtuous toil may terminate at last
In settled habit and decided taste. —
But whom do I advise? the fashion led,
The incorrigibly wrong, the deaf, the dead,
Whom care and cool deliberation suit
Not better much than spectacles a brute;
Who, if their sons some slight tuition share,
Deem it of no great moment whose or where;
Too proud to adopt the thoughts of one unknown,
And much too gay to have any of their own.
But courage, man! methought the muse replied,
Mankind are various, and the world is wide:
The ostrich, silliest of the feather'd kind,
And form'd of God without a parent's mind,
Commits her eggs incautious to the dust,
Forgetful that the foot may crush the trust;
And, while on public nurseries they rely,
Not knowing, and too oft not caring, why,
Irrational in what they thus prefer,
No few, that would seem wise, resemble her.
But all are not alike. Thy warning voice
May here and there prevent erroneous choice;
And some, perhaps, who, busy as they are,
Yet make their progeny their dearest care
(Whose hearts will ache, once told what ills may reach
Their offspring, left upon so wild a beach,)
Will need no stress of argument to enforce
The expedience of a less adventurous course:
The rest will slight thy counsel, or condemn;
But *they* have human feelings — turn to *them*.
To you then, tenants of life's middle state,
Securely placed between the small and great,
Whose character, yet undebauch'd, retains
Two-thirds of all the virtue that remains,
Who, wise yourselves, desire your son should learn
Your wisdom and your ways — to you I turn.

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Look round you on a world perversely blind;
See what contempt is fallen on humankind;
See wealth abused, and dignities misplaced,
Great titles, offices, and trusts disgraced,
Long lines of ancestry, renown'd of old,
Their noble qualities all quench'd and cold;
See Bedlam's closeted and hand-cuff'd charge
Surpass'd in frenzy by the mad at large;
See great commanders making war a trade,
Great lawyers, lawyers without study made;
Churchmen, in whose esteem their blest employ
Is odious, and their wages all their joy,
Who, far enough from furnishing their shelves
With Gospel lore, turn infidels themselves;
See womanhood despised, and manhood shamed
With infamy too nauseous to he named,
Fops at all corners, ladylike in mien,
Civeted fellows, smelt ere they are seen,
Else coarse and rude in manners, and their tongue
On fire with curses, and with nonsense hung,
Now flush'd with drunkenness, now with whoredom pale,
Their breath a sample of last night's regale;
See volunteers in all the vilest arts,
Men well endow'd, of honourable parts,
Design'd by Nature wise, but self-made fools:
All these, and more like these, were bred at schools.
And if it chance, as sometimes chance it will,
That though school-bred, the boy be virtuous still,
Such rare exceptions, shining in the dark,
Prove, rather than impeach, the just remark;
As here and there a twinkling star descried
Serves but to shew how black is all beside.
Now look on him, whose very voice in tone
Just echoes thine, whose features are thine own,
And stroke his polish'd cheek of purest red,
And lay thine hand upon his flaxen head,
And say, My boy, the unwelcome hour is come,
When thou, transplanted from thy genial home,
Must find a colder soil and bleaker air,
And trust for safety to a stranger's care;

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What character, what turn thou wilt assume
From constant converse with I know not whom;
Who there will court thy friendship, with what views,
And, artless as thou art, whom thou wilt choose;
Though much depends on what thy choice shall be,
Is all chance medley, and unknown to me.
Canst thou, the tear just trembling on thy lids,
And while the dreadful risk foreseen forbids,
Free, too, and under no constraining force,
Unless the sway of custom warp thy course,
Lay such a stake upon the losing side,
Merely to gratify so blind a guide?
Thou canst not! Nature, pulling at thine heart,
Condemns the unfatherly, the imprudent part.
Thou wouldst not, deaf to Nature's tenderest plea,
Turn him adrift upon a rolling sea,
Nor say, *Go thither*, conscious that there lay
A brood of asps, or quicksands in his way;
Then only, govern'd by the self-same rule
Of natural pity, send him not to school.
No—guard him better. Is he not thine own,
Thyself in miniature, thy flesh, thy bone?
And hopest thou not ('tis every father's hope),
That, since thy strength must with thy years elope,
And thou wilt need some comfort, to assuage
Health's last farewell, a staff of thine old age,
That then, in recompense of all thy cares,
Thy child shall shew respect to thy gray hairs,
Befriend thee, of all other friends bereft,
And give thy life its only cordial left?
Aware, then, how much danger intervenes,
To compass that good end, forecast the means.
His heart, now passive, yields to thy command;
Secure it thine, its key is in thine hand.
If thou desert thy charge, and throw it wide,
Nor heed what guests there enter and abide,
Complain not if attachments lewd and base
Supplant thee in it, and usurp thy place.
But, if thou guard its secret chambers sure
From vicious inmates, and delights impure,

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Either his gratitude shall hold him fast,
And keep him warm and filial to the last;
Or, if he prove unkind, (as who can say
But, being man, and therefore frail, he may?)
One comfort yet shall cheer thine aged heart,
Howe'er he slight thee, thou hast done thy part.
  Oh, barbarous! wouldst thou with a Gothic hand
Pull down the schools—what?—all the schools i' the land,
Or throw them up to livery nags and grooms,
Or turn them into shops and auction rooms?—
A captious question, sir, (and yours is one,)
Deserves an answer similar, or none.
Wouldst thou, possessor of a flock, employ
(Apprised that he is such) a careless boy,
And feed him well, and give him handsome pay,
Merely to sleep, and let them run astray?
Survey our schools and colleges, and see
A sight not much unlike my simile.
From education, as the leading cause,
The public character its colour draws;
Thence the prevailing manners take their cast,
Extravagant or sober, loose or chaste.
And though I would not advertise them yet,
Nor write on each,—*This building to be let*,
Unless the world were all prepared to embrace
A plan well worthy to supply their place;
Yet, backward as they are, and long have been,
To cultivate and keep the *morals* clean,
(Forgive the crime) I wish them, I confess,
Or better managed, or encouraged less.

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MISCELLANEOUS POEMS.

The Minor Poems of Cowper are here arranged in the order of their dates; or, where these could not be ascertained, the authority of the earliest editions has been preferred. Only twenty-six of these original performances were published by the author. The rest either appeared separately in the different periodicals of the time, generally with his permission, or remained unknown beyond the circle of those friends to whom they were communicated in the course of correspondence. The various repositories in which those gems had previously been scattered, if not concealed, have been searched, and if nothing absolutely new remained to reward this industry, at least the present collection has thus been rendered the amplest yet published, and affords the advantage of perusing with ease and in regular series, what had formerly to be sought for in a number of unconnected volumes.

To the more important pieces, likewise, a circumstantial note is generally appended; but where public favour has so long been declared, particular criticism seemed altogether unnecessary. Here it may, however, be remarked, that in his Occasional Verses, Cowper ranks among the most successful of English authors; a merit of very rare attainment. Such compositions demand a concentration, yet flexibility of idea, a delicacy of turn, and a happiness of expression, not less the fruits of practice than natural gifts, and which are yet wanting in the similar productions of many deservedly eminent for their labours of higher pretension. His excellence here is not indeed uniform; yet even in his least perfect attempts, there is always some redeeming quality, often some unexpected beauty, which not only rescues them from the disgrace of failure, but raises them above mediocrity. In the happiest pieces, what

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more pathetic than their simple tenderness, or more touching than their dignified seriousness? or, in the lighter compositions, what more airy than their ingeniousness, more polished than their gaiety? Cowper's fancy, like his character,—at once refined, yet natural—meditative, yet playful—working out thought into new and unexpected, yet pleasing and unforced relations,—peculiarly fitted its possessor for excelling in this walk of poetry. Hence in all the finished specimens of these minor effusions, while we are struck with the general effect, which, according to the subject, takes captive the heart, or gently surprises the imagination, careful reperusal seldom fails to bring out some latent beauty, some recondite allusion which had before escaped us. These productions thus resemble some exquisite cabinet picture, which, by its arrangement and breadth, charms at once as a whole, while it delights on minute examination by its hues, its handling, and its sentiment.

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MISCELLANEOUS POEMS.

THE DOVES.

[With these verses Cowper commenced his Occasional Poems, as originally printed. The lines were written in May or June, 1780, and first transcribed in a private letter to Mrs Newton, which ends thus: "The male dove was smoking a pipe, and the female dove was sewing, while she delivered herself as above. This little circumstance may lead you, perhaps, to guess what pair I had in my eye." Lest the reader now, from these undove like occupations, should "guess wide," it may be necessary to add here, that the "doves" were Mr and Mrs Bull.]

REASONING at every step he treads,
  Man yet mistakes his way,
While meaner things, whom instinct leads,
  Are rarely known to stray.

One silent eve I wander'd late,
  And heard the voice of love;
The turtle thus address'd her mate,
  And soothed the listening dove:

"Our mutual bond of faith and truth
  No time shall disengage,
Those blessings of our early youth
  Shall cheer our latest age:

"While innocence without disguise,
  And constancy sincere,
Shall fill the circles of those eyes,
  And mine can read them there;

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"Those ills, that wait on all below,
Shall ne'er be felt by me,
Or gently felt, and only so,
As being shared with thee.

"When lightnings flash among the trees,
Or kites are hovering near,
I fear lest thee alone they seize,
And know no other fear.

"'Tis then I feel myself a wife,
And press thy wedded side,
Resolved a union form'd for life
Death never shall divide.

"But oh! if fickle and unchaste,
(Forgive a transient thought)
Thou should become unkind at last,
And scorn thy present lot,

"No need of lightning from on high,
Or kites with cruel beak;
Denied the endearments of thine eye,
This widow'd heart would break."

Thus sang the sweet sequester'd bird,
Soft as the passing wind;
And I recorded what I heard,
A lesson for mankind.

A FABLE.

[Suggested by a circumstance which actually occurred in an orchard adjoining to the Poet's summer-house and study. The piece is first mentioned in a letter to Newton, and was written in the spring of 1780.]

A RAVEN, while with glossy breast
Her new-laid eggs she fondly press'd,
And on her wickerwork high mounted,
Her chickens prematurely counted,

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(A fault philosophers might blame
If quite exempted from the same,)
Enjoy'd at ease the genial day;
'Twas April, as the bumpkins say,
The legislature call'd it May.
But suddenly a wind as high
As ever swept a winter sky,
Shook the young leaves about her ears,
And fill'd her with a thousand fears,
Lest the rude blast should snap the bough,
And spread her golden hopes below.
But just at eve the blowing weather
And all her fears were hush'd together:
And now, quoth poor unthinking Ralph,
'Tis over, and the brood is safe;
(For ravens, though as birds of omen
They teach both conj'rers and old women,
To tell us what is to befall,
Can't prophesy themselves at all.)
The morning came, when neighbour Hodge,
Who long had mark'd her airy lodge,
And destined all the treasure there
A gift to his expecting fair,
Climb'd like a squirrel to his dray,
And bore the worthless prize away.

MORAL.

'Tis Providence alone secures,
In every change, both mine and yours:
Safety consists not in escape
From dangers of a frightful shape;
An earthquake may be bid to spare
The man that 's strangled by a hair.
Fate steals along with silent tread
Found oftenest in what least we dread,—
Frowns in the storm with angry brow,
But in the sunshine strikes the blow.

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A COMPARISON.

[Both of these beautiful little pieces were written in 1780. The young lady to whom the second is addressed, was Miss Shuttleworth, the sister of Mrs W. C. Unwin.]

THE lapse of time and rivers is the same,
Both speed their journey with a restless stream;
The silent pace with which they steal away,
No wealth can bribe, nor prayers persuade to stay;
Alike irrevocable both when past,
And a wide ocean swallows both at last.
Though each resemble each in every part,
A difference strikes at length the musing heart:
Streams never flow in vain; where streams abound,
How laughs the land with various plenty crown'd!
But time, that should enrich the nobler mind,
Neglected leaves a weary waste behind.

ANOTHER.

ADDRESSED TO A YOUNG LADY.

SWEET stream, that winds through yonder glade,
Apt emblem of a virtuous maid,
Silent and chaste she steals along,
Far from the world's gay busy throng;
With gentle yet prevailing force,
Intent upon her destined course;
Graceful and useful all she does,
Blessing and blest where'er she goes,
Pure-bosom'd as that watery glass,
And heaven reflected in her face.

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VERSES,

SUPPOSED TO BE WRITTEN BY ALEXANDER SELKIRK, DURING HIS SOLITARY ABODE IN THE ISLAND OF JUAN FERNANDEZ.

[Cowper's exquisite verses, and the admirable fiction of De Foe, have cast a romantic tenderness over the story of Selkirk's life, which it is painful to find unsustained by his natural dispositions. This adventurer, the son of a fisherman of Nether Largo, a village on the Fifeshire coast, was born in 1676, and in consequence of a family quarrel, arising out of his own irascible temper, went to sea. After several years' absence he returned, bringing with him the gun, chest, and drinking cup which he had used during his abode on Juan Fernandez: the two latter of these are still in possession of his surviving relative, a grand-niece, residing in the cottage where Alexander was born. He remained about nine months at home, leading a recluse life, going out only at night or early in the morning; and seems to have regretted his solitude, for he was often overheard lamenting the loss of "his island." This sentiment, the only poetical feeling which we can discover about the man, probably sent him out again a wanderer over the waste of waters; but of his subsequent fate, nothing was ever known.]

I AM monarch of all I survey,
  My right there is none to dispute;
From the centre all round to the sea,
  I am lord of the fowl and the brute.
O Solitude! where are the charms
  That sages have seen in thy face?
Better dwell in the midst of alarms
  Than reign in this horrible place.

I am out of humanity's reach,
  I must finish my journey alone,
Never hear the sweet music of speech,
  I start at the sound of my own.
The beasts, that roam over the plain,
  My form with indifference see;
They are so unacquainted with man,
  Their tameness is shocking to me.

Society, friendship, and love,
  Divinely bestow'd upon man,
Oh, had I the wings of a dove,
  How soon would I taste you again!

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My sorrows I then might assuage
  In the ways of religion and truth,
Might learn from the wisdom of age,
  And be cheer'd by the sallies of youth.

Religion! what treasure untold
  Resides in that heavenly word!
More precious than silver and gold,
  Or all that this earth can afford.
But the sound of the church-going bell
  These valleys and rocks never heard,
Never sigh'd at the sound of a knell,
  Or smiled when a sabbath appear'd.

Ye winds, that have made me your sport,
  Convey to this desolate shore
Some cordial endearing report
  Of a land I shall visit no more.
My friends, do they now and then send
  A wish or a thought after me?
O tell me I yet have a friend,
  Though a friend I am never to see.

How fleet is a glance of the mind!
  Compared with the speed of its flight,
The tempest itself lags behind,
  And the swift-wing'd arrows of light.
When I think of my own native land,
  In a moment I seem to be there;
But, alas! recollection at hand
  Soon hurries me back to despair.

But the sea-fowl is gone to her nest,
  The beast is laid down in his lair;
Even here is a season of rest,
  And I to my cabin repair.
There 's mercy in every place,
  And mercy, encouraging thought!
Gives even affliction a grace,
  And reconciles man to his lot.

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ON THE PROMOTION OF

EDWARD THURLOW, ESQ.

TO THE

LORD HIGH CHANCELLORSHIP OF ENGLAND.

[The first mention of these verses occurs in a note to Mr Hill, dated November 14, 1779, in which the author feelingly says, "I wrote them, indeed, on purpose for you; for my subjects are not always such as I could hope would prove agreable to you. My mind has always a melancholy cast, and is like some pools I have seen, which, though filled with a black and putrid water, will, nevertheless, in a bright day, reflect the sunbeams from their surface." Thurlow's ungenerous neglect of the disinterested and elegant compliment, was alike dishonourable to his own heart, and distressing to Cowper's affectionate temper. See *Life* and *Letters*.]

ROUND Thurlow's head in early youth,
  And in his sportive days,
Fair Science pour'd the light of truth,
  And Genius shed his rays.

See! with united wonder cried
  The experienced and the sage,
Ambition in a boy supplied
  With all the skill of age!

Discernment, eloquence, and grace
  Proclaim him born to sway
The balance in the highest place,
  And bear the palm away.

The praise bestow'd was just and wise;
  He sprang impetuous forth
Secure of conquest, where the prize
  Attends superior worth.

So the best courser on the plain
  Ere yet he starts is known,
And does but at the goal obtain
  What all had deem'd his own.

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ODE TO PEACE.

[These verses were composed in the commencement of Cowper's second attack of mental indisposition.]

Come, peace of mind, delightful guest!
Return, and make thy downy nest
  Once more in this sad heart:
Nor riches I nor power pursue,
Nor hold forbidden joys in view;
  We, therefore, need not part.

Where wilt thou dwell, if not with me,
From avarice and ambition free,
  And pleasure's fatal wiles?
For whom, alas! dost thou prepare
The sweet, that I was wont to share,
  The banquet of thy smiles?

The great, the gay, shall they partake
The heaven that thou alone canst make?
  And wilt thou quit the stream,
That murmurs through the dewy mead,
The grove and the sequester'd shed,
  To be a guest with them?

For thee I panted, thee I prized,
For thee I gladly sacrificed
  Whate'er I loved before;
And shall I see thee start away,
And helpless, hopeless, hear thee say—
  "Farewell! we meet no more!"

ANOTHER.

When all within is peace,
  How Nature seems to smile!
Delights that never cease,
  The live-long day beguile;

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From morn to dewy eve,
  With open hand she showers
Fresh blessings, to deceive
  And soothe the silent hours.

It is content of heart
  Gives Nature power to please;
The mind that feels no smart
  Enlivens all it sees;
Can make a wintry sky
  Seem bright as smiling May,
And evening's closing eye
  As peep of early day.

The vast majestic globe,
  So beauteously array'd
In Nature's various robe
  With wond'rous skill display'd,
Is to a mourner's heart
  A dreary wild at best;
It flutters to depart,
  And longs to be at rest.

THE MODERN PATRIOT.

[The poet speaks of verses under the same title, suggested by some of Burke's political schemes, but adds, that he burned them next morning. These seem, however, to be the same; they were composed in 1780.]

REBELLION is my theme all day,
  I only wish 'twould come
(As who knows but perhaps it may?)
  A little nearer home.

Yon rearing boys, who rave and fight
  On t'other side the Atlantic,
I always held them in the right,
  But most so when most frantic.

When lawless mobs insult the court,
  That man shall be my toast,

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If breaking windows be the sport,
  Who bravely breaks the most.

But oh! for him my fancy culls
  The choicest flowers she bears,
Who constitutionally pulls
  Your house about your ears.

Such civil broils are my delight,
  Though some folks can't endure them,
Who say the mob are mad outright,
  And that a rope must cure them.

A rope! I wish we patriots had
  Such strings for all who need 'em—
What! hang a man for going mad!
  Then farewell British freedom.

ON OBSERVING SOME

NAMES OF LITTLE NOTE

RECORDED IN THE BIOGRAPHIA BRITANNICA.

[Cowper had borrowed the Biographia Britannica from Mr Unwin, to whom, in consequence, these admirably sarcastic lines were sent in September, 1780.]

Oh, fond attempt to give a deathless lot
To names ignoble, born to be forgot!
In vain, recorded in historic page,
They court the notice of a future age:
Those twinkling tiny lustres of the land
Drop one by one from Fame's neglecting hand;
Lethæan gulfs receive them as they fall,
And dark oblivion soon absorbs them all.
  So when a child, as playful children use,
Has burnt to tinder a stale last year's news,
The flame extinct, he views the roving fire—
There goes my lady, and there goes the squire;
There goes the parson, O illustrious spark!
And there, scarce less illustrious, goes the clerk!

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REPORT

OF AN ADJUDGED CASE, NOT TO BE FOUND IN ANY OF THE BOOKS.

[This piece, which a critic has pronounced, "in gravity of ridicule unexcelled," appears to have been a favourite with the author; for in his letters it is more than once transcribed. The first copy was sent to Mr Hill, December, 1780.

BETWEEN Nose and Eyes a strange contest arose,
  The spectacles set them unhappily wrong;
The point in dispute was, as all the world knows,
  To which the said spectacles ought to belong.

So Tongue was the lawyer, and argued the cause
  With a great deal of skill, and a wig full of learning;
While chief baron Ear sat to balance the laws,
  So famed for his talent in nicely discerning.

"In behalf of the Nose, it will quickly appear,
  And your lordship," he said, "will undoubtedly find,
That the Nose has had spectacles always in wear,
  Which amounts to possession, time out of mind."

Then holding the spectacles up to the court—
  "Your lordship observes they are made with a straddle,
As wide as the ridge of the nose is; in short
  Design'd to sit close to it, just like a saddle.

"Again, would your lordship a moment suppose
  ('Tis a case that has happen'd, and may be again)
That the visage or countenance had not a nose,
  Pray who would, or who could, wear spectacles then?

"On the whole it appears, and my argument shows,
  With a reasoning the court will never condemn,
That the spectacles plainly were made for the Nose,
  And the Nose was as plainly intended for them."

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Then shifting his side, (as a lawyer knows how,)
  He pleaded again in behalf of the Eyes:
But what were his arguments few people know,
  For the court did not think they were equally wise.

So his Lordship decreed, with a grave solemn tone,
  Decisive and clear, without one *if* or *but*—
That, whenever the Nose put his spectacles on,
  By daylight or candlelight—Eyes should be shut! *

ON THE BURNING OF
LORD MANSFIELD'S LIBRARY,
TOGETHER WITH HIS MSS,
BY THE MOB, IN THE MONTH OF JUNE, 1780.

[Written on the morning of the 22d June, 1780. Lord Mansfield's house was burnt on the night of the 8-9th, as we learn from the journal of Crabbe, the poet, then a nameless, almost houseless, wanderer in the streets of the metropolis, yet destined to divide with Cowper the honour of being "England's domestic bard."]

So, then, the Vandals of our isle,
  Sworn foes to sense and law,
Have burnt to dust a nobler pile
  Than ever Roman saw!

And MURRAY sighs o'er Pope and Swift,
  And many a treasure more,
The well judged purchase, and the gift,
  That graced his letter'd store.

Their pages mangled, burnt and torn,
  The loss was *his alone;*
But ages yet to come shall mourn
  The burning of *his own.*

* There is a "sly reserve" in this decision without the implication of absurdity, as most readers understand it: we instinctively close the eye on the approach of any object, and on putting on spectacles, people invariably look very grave, and shut both eyes. This the poet seems to have had in view, and has expressed with that admirable quaintness, which constitutes the essence of humour.

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ON THE SAME.

When wit and genius meet their doom
  In all devouring flame,
They tell us of the fate of Rome,
  And bid us fear the same.

O'er Murray's loss the muses wept
  They felt the rude alarm,
Yet bless'd the guardian care that kept
  His sacred head from harm.

There memory, like the bee, that's fed
  From Flora's balmy store,
The quintessence of all he read
  Had treasured up before.

The lawless herd, with fury blind,
  Have done him cruel wrong;
The flowers are gone—but still we find
  The honey on his tongue.

THE LOVE OF THE WORLD REPROVED; OR, HYPOCRISY DETECTED.*

[The original order is retained in placing this poem, the date of which is not exactly fixed.]

Thus says the prophet of the Turk,
"Good Mussulman, abstain from pork;
There is a part in every swine
No friend or follower of mine
May taste, whate'er his inclination,
On pain of excommunication."
Such Mahomet's mysterious charge,
And thus he left the point at large.

* It may be proper to inform the reader, that this piece has already appeared in print, having found its way, though with some unnecessary additions by an unknown hand, into the Leeds Journal, without the author's privity. — *Author's note.*

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Had he the sinful part express'd,
They might with safety eat the rest;
But for one piece they thought it hard
From the whole hog to be debarr'd;
And set their wit at work to find
What joint the prophet had in mind.
Much controversy straight arose,
These choose the back, the belly those;
By some 'tis confidently said
He meant not to forbid the head;
While others at that doctrine rail,
And piously prefer the tail.
Thus, conscience freed from every clog,
Mahometans eat up the hog.
You laugh — 'tis well — the tale applied
May make you laugh on t'other side.
Renounce the world — the preacher cries:
We do — a multitude replies.
While one as innocent regards
A snug and friendly game at cards;
And one, whatever you may say,
Can see no evil in a play;
Some love a concert or a race,
And others shooting and the chase.
Reviled and loved, renounced and follow'd,
Thus bit by bit the world is swallow'd;
Each thinks his neighbour makes too free,
Yet likes a slice as well as he;
With sophistry their sauce they sweeten,
Till quite from tail to snout 'tis eaten.

THE LILY AND THE ROSE.

[The order adopted by Cowper has been retained here: the poem was first transcribed in a letter to Unwin, but without date, in which the author says, "No man, I believe, has less to do with ladies' cheeks than I have: my mind was never in a more trifling butterfly humour than when I composed these verses."]

The nymph must lose her female friend,
If more admired than she —
But where will fierce contention end,
If flowers can disagree?

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Within the garden's peaceful scene
  Appear'd two lovely foes,
Aspiring to the rank of queen,
  The Lily and the Rose.

The Rose soon redden'd into rage,
  And, swelling with disdain,
Appeal'd to many a poet's page
  To prove her right to reign.

The Lily's height bespoke command,
  A fair imperial flower;
She seem'd design'd for Flora's hand,
  The sceptre of her power.

This civil bickering and debate
  The goddess chanced to hear,
And flew to save, ere yet too late,
  The pride of the parterre.

Yours is, she said, the nobler hue,
  And yours the statelier mien;
And, till a third surpasses you,
  Let each be deem'd a queen.

Thus, sooth'd and reconciled, each seeks
  The fairest British fair:
The seat of empire is her cheeks,
  They reign united there.

THE NIGHTINGALE AND GLOW-WORM.

[Composed in February, 1780, and suggested by reading a philosophical essay in the *Register* on the food of the nightingale.]

A NIGHTINGALE, that all day long
Had cheer'd the village with his song,
Nor yet at eve his note suspended,
Nor yet when eventide was ended,
Began to feel, as well he might,
The keen demands of appetite;

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When, looking eagerly around,
He spied far off, upon the ground,
A something shining in the dark,
And knew the glow-worm by his spark;
So, stooping down from hawthorn top,
He thought to put him in his crop.
The worm, aware of his intent,
Harangued him thus, right eloquent,—
"Did you admire my lamp," quoth he,
"As much as I your minstrelsy,
You would abhor to do me wrong,
As much as I to spoil your song;
For 'twas the selfsame Power divine
Taught you to sing and me to shine;
That you with music, I with light,
Might beautify and cheer the night."
The songster heard his short oration,
And, warbling out his approbation,
Released him, as my story tells,
And found a supper somewhere else,
Hence jarring sectaries may learn
Their real interest to discern;
That brother should not war with brother,
And worry and devour each other:
But sing and shine by sweet consent,
Till life's poor transient night is spent,
Respecting in each other's case
The gifts of nature and of grace.
Those Christians best deserve the name,
Who studiously make peace their aim;
Peace both the duty and the prize
Of him that creeps and him that flies.

ON A GOLDFINCH,

STARVED TO DEATH IN HIS CAGE.

[These lines refer to an incident which took place in the next house to the Poet's, in the summer of 1779, when they were written.]

Time was when I was free as air,
The thistle's downy seed my fare,
My drink the morning dew;

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I perch'd at will on every spray,
My form genteel, my plumage gay,
  My strains for ever new.

But gaudy plumage, sprightly strain,
And form genteel, were all in vain,
  And of a transient date;
For caught, and caged, and starved to death,
In dying sighs my little breath
  Soon pass'd the wiry grate.

Thanks, gentle swain, for all my woes,
And thanks for this effectual close
  And cure of every ill;
More cruelty could none express;
And I, if you had shewn me less,
  Had been your prisoner still.

THE PINE-APPLE AND THE BEE.

[This was one of the earliest poems which Cowper composed after his second recovery, having been written in the spring of 1779: the first copy was addressed to Mr Hill, whose lady had supplied the poet with the seeds which produced his pine-apples.]

The pine-apples, in triple row,
Were basking hot, and all in blow;
A Bee of most discerning taste,
Perceived the fragrance as he pass'd.
On eager wing the spoiler came,
And search'd for crannies in the frame,
Urged his attempt on every side,
To every pane his trunk applied;
But still in vain, the frame was tight,
And only pervious to the light:
Thus having wasted half the day,
He trimm'd his flight another way.
  Methinks, I said, in thee I find
The sin and madness of mankind.
To joys forbidden man aspires,
Consumes his soul with vain desires;

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Folly the spring of his pursuit,
And disappointment all the fruit.
While Cynthio ogles, as she passes,
The nymph between two chariot glasses,
She is the pine-apple, and he
The silly unsuccessful bee.
The maid, who views with pensive air
The show-glass fraught with glittering ware,
Sees watches, bracelets, rings, and lockets,
But sighs at thought of empty pockets;
Like thine, her appetite is keen,
But ah, the cruel glass between!
  Our dear delights are often such,
Exposed to view, but not to touch;
The sight our foolish heart inflames,
We long for pine-apples in frames;
With hopeless wish one looks and lingers;
One breaks the glass and cuts his fingers;
But they whom truth and wisdom lead,
Can gather honey from a weed.

HORACE, Book II. Ode X.

[Translated in the Autumn of 1779; and inserted here among the author's original verses for the sake of the "Reflection."]

Receive, dear friend, the truths I teach,
So shalt thou live beyond the reach
  Of adverse Fortune's power;
Not always tempt the distant deep,
Nor always timorously creep
  Along the treacherous shore.

He, that holds fast the golden mean,
And lives contentedly between
  The little and the great,
Feels not the wants that pinch the poor,
Nor plagues that haunt the rich man's door,
  Imbittering all his state.

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The tallest pines feel most the power
Of wintry blasts; the loftiest tower
  Comes heaviest to the ground;
The bolts that spare the mountain's side,
His cloud-capt eminence divide,
  And spread the ruin round.

The well-inform'd philosopher
Rejoices with a wholesome fear,
  And hopes, in spite of pain;
If Winter bellow from the north,
Soon the sweet Spring comes dancing forth,
And Nature laughs again.

What if thine heaven be overcast,
The dark appearance will not last;
  Expect a brighter sky.
The God that strings the silver bow
Awakes sometimes the muses too,
  And lays his arrows by.

If hindrances obstruct thy way,
Thy magnanimity display,
  And let thy strength be seen;
But, oh! if Fortune fill thy sail
With more than a propitious gale,
  Take half thy canvass in.

A REFLECTION

ON THE FOREGOING ODE.

And is this all? Can reason do no more
Than bid me shun the deep, and dread the shore?
Sweet moralist! afloat on life's rough sea,
The Christian has an art unknown to thee.
He holds no parley with unmanly fears;
Where duty bids he confidently steers,
Faces a thousand dangers at her call,
And, trusting in his God, surmounts them all.

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THE SHRUBBERY,

WRITTEN IN A TIME OF AFFLICTION.

[The name is taken from a favourite resort of the Poet's in the grounds of Weston-Underwood. Composed soon after the lines "To Peace."]

Oh, happy shades—to me unblest!
  Friendly to peace, but not to me!
How ill the scene that offers rest,
  And heart that cannot rest, agree!

This glassy stream, that spreading pine,
  Those alders quivering to the breeze,
Might soothe a soul less hurt than mine,
  And please, if any thing could please.

But fix'd unalterable Care
  Foregoes not what she feels within,
Shews the same sadness every where,
  And slights the season and the scene.

For all that pleased in wood or lawn,
  While Peace possess'd these silent bowers,
Her animating smile withdrawn,
  Has lost its beauties and its powers.

The saint or moralist should tread
  This moss-grown alley, musing, slow;
They seek like me the sacred shade,
  But not like me to nourish wo!

Me fruitful scenes, and prospects waste,
  Alike admonish not to roam;
These tell me of enjoyments past,
  And those of sorrows yet to come.

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THE WINTER NOSEGAY.

[Another pleasing example of a simple incident of domestic life, exquisitely versified. February, 1780.]

WHAT Nature, alas! has denied
  To the delicate growth of our isle,
Art has in a measure supplied,
  And Winter is deck'd with a smile.
See, Mary, what beauties I bring
  From the shelter of that sunny shed,
Where the flowers have the charms of the spring,
  Though abroad they are frozen and dead.

'Tis a bower of Arcadian sweets,
  Where Flora is still in her prime,
A fortress to which she retreats
  From the cruel assaults of the clime.
While Earth wears a mantle of snow,
  These pinks are as fresh and as gay,
As the fairest and sweetest that blow
  On the beautiful bosom of May.

See how they have safely survived
  The frowns of a sky so severe;
Such Mary's true love, that has lived
  Through many a turbulent year.
The charms of the late blowing rose
  Seem graced with a livelier hue,
And the winter of sorrow best shows
  The truth of a friend such as you.

MUTUAL FORBEARANCE

NECESSARY TO THE HAPPINESS OF THE MARRIED STATE.

THE lady thus address'd her spouse:—
"What a mere dungeon is this house!
By no means large enough; and was it,
Yet this dull room, and that dark closet,

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Those hangings with their worn-out graces,
Long beards, long noses, and pale faces,
Are such an antiquated scene,
They overwhelm me with the spleen."
Sir Humphrey, shooting in the dark,
Makes answer quite beside the mark:
"No doubt, my dear, I bade him come,
Engaged myself to be at home,
And shall expect him at the door,
Precisely when the clock strikes four."
"You are so deaf," the lady cried,
And raised her voice, and frown'd beside,
"You are so sadly deaf, my dear,
What shall I do to make you hear?'
"Dismiss poor Harry!" he replies;
"Some people are more nice than wise:
For one slight trespass all this stir?
What if he did ride whip and spur,
'Twas but a mile—your favourite horse
Will never look one hair the worse."
"Well, I protest 'tis past all bearing"—
"Child! I am rather hard of hearing"—
"Yes, truly; one must scream and bawl:
I tell you, you can't hear at all!"
Then, with a voice exceeding low,
"No matter if you hear or no."
Alas! and is domestic strife,
That sorest ill of human life,
A plague so little to be fear'd,
As to be wantonly incurr'd,
To gratify a fretful passion,
On every trivial provocation?
The kindest and the happiest pair
Will find occasion to forbear;
And something, every day they live,
To pity, and perhaps forgive.
But if infirmities, that fall
In common to the lot of all,
A blemish or a sense impair'd,
Are crimes so little to be spared,

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Then farewell all that must create
The comfort of the wedded state;
Instead of harmony, 'tis jar,
And tumult, and intestine war.
  The love that cheers life's latest stage,
Proof against sickness and old age,
Preserved by virtue from declension,
Becomes not weary of attention;
But lives, when that exterior grace,
Which first inspired the flame, decays;
'Tis gentle, delicate, and kind,
To faults compassionate or blind,
And will with sympathy endure
Those evils it would gladly cure:
But angry, coarse, and harsh expression
Shews love to be a mere profession;
Proves that the heart is none of his,
Or soon expels him if it is.

TO THE REV. MR NEWTON.

AN INVITATION INTO THE COUNTRY. WRITTEN 1780.

THE swallows in their torpid state
  Compose their useless wing,
And bees in hives as idly wait
  The call of early Spring.

The keenest frost that binds the stream,
  The wildest wind that blows,
Are neither felt nor fear'd by them,
  Secure of their repose.

But man, all feeling and awake,
  The gloomy scene surveys;
With present ills his heart must ache,
  And pant for brighter days.

Old Winter, halting o'er the mead,
  Bids me and Mary mourn;
But lovely Spring peeps o'er his head,
  And whispers your return.

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Then April, with her sister May,
  Shall chase him from the bowers,
And weave fresh garlands every day,
  To crown the smiling hours.

And if a tear, that speaks regret
  Of happier times, appear,
A glimpse of joy, that we have met,
  Shall shine and dry the tear.

BOADICEA.

AN ODE.

[This spirit-stirring ode was suggested by the reading of Hume's history, during the winter of 1780.]

When the British warrior queen,
  Bleeding from the Roman rods,
Sought, with an indignant mien,
  Counsel of her country's gods,

Sage beneath the spreading oak
  Sat the Druid, hoary chief;
Every burning word he spoke
  Full of rage, and full of grief.

"Princess! if our aged eyes
  Weep upon thy matchless wrongs,
'Tis because resentment ties
  All the terrors of our tongues.

"Rome shall perish—write that word
  In the blood that she has spilt;
Perish, hopeless and abhorr'd,
  Deep in ruin as in guilt.

"Rome, for empire far renown'd,
  Tramples on a thousand states;
Soon her pride shall kiss the ground—
  Hark! the Gaul is at her gates!

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"Other Romans shall arise,
Heedless of a soldier's name;
Sounds, not arms, shall win the prize,
Harmony the path to fame.

"Then the progeny that springs
From the forests of our land,
Arm'd with thunder, clad with wings,
Shall a wider world command.

"Regions Cæsar never knew,
Thy posterity shall sway;
Where his eagles never flew,
None invincible as they."

Such the bard's prophetic words,
Pregnant with celestial fire,
Bending as he swept the chords
Of his sweet but awful lyre.

She, with all a monarch's pride,
Felt them in her bosom glow:
Rush'd to battle, fought and died;
Dying, hurl'd them at the foe.

"Ruffians, pitiless as proud,
Heaven awards the vengeance due;
Empire is on us bestow'd,
Shame and ruin wait for you."

HEROISM.

[This poem, finished in 1779, its author had named the "Burning Mountain," and intended it to occupy, as he says, "the van of the light infantry." In correcting the proof sheets of his first volume, however, he adopted its present place and appellation.]

There was a time when Ætna's silent fire
Slept unperceived, the mountain yet entire;
When, conscious of no danger from below,
She tower'd a cloud-capt pyramid of snow.

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No thunders shook with deep intestine sound
The blooming groves that girdled her around.
Her unctuous olives, and her purple vines,
(Unfelt the fury of those bursting mines)
The peasant's hopes, and not in vain, assured,
In peace upon her sloping sides matured.
When on a day, like that of the last doom,
A conflagration labouring in her womb,
She teem'd and heaved with an infernal birth
That shook the circling seas and solid earth.
Dark and voluminous the vapours rise,
And hang their horrors in the neighbouring skies
While through the Stygian veil, that blots the day,
In dazzling streaks the vivid lightnings play.
But, oh! what muse, and in what powers of song,
Can trace the torrent as it burns along?
Havock and devastation in the van,
It marches o'er the prostrate works of man;
Vines, olives, herbage, forests disappear,
And all the charms of a Sicilian year.
  Revolving seasons, fruitless as they pass,
See it an uninform'd and idle mass;
Without a soil to invite the tiller's care,
Or blade that might redeem it from despair.
Yet time at length (what will not time achieve?)
Clothes it with earth, and bids the produce live.
Once more the spiry myrtle crowns the glade,
And ruminating flocks enjoy the shade.
O bliss precarious, and unsafe retreats,
O charming Paradise of short-lived sweets!
The selfsame gale that wafts the fragrance round,
Brings to the distant ear a sullen sound:
Again the mountain feels the imprison'd foe,
Again pours ruin on the vale below.
Ten thousand swains the wasted scene deplore,
That only future ages can restore.
  Ye monarchs, whom the lure of honour draws,
Who write in blood the merits of your cause,
Who strike the blow, then plead your own defence,
Glory your aim, but justice your pretence;

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Behold in Ætna's emblematic fires,
The mischiefs your ambitious pride inspires!
  Fast by the stream that bounds your just domain,
And tells you where ye have a right to reign,
A nation dwells, not envious of your throne,
Studious of peace, their neighbours' and their own.
Ill-fated race! how deeply must they rue
Their only crime, vicinity to you!
The trumpet sounds, your legions swarm abroad,
Through the ripe harvest lies their destined road;
At every step beneath their feet they tread
The life of multitudes—a nation's bread!
Earth seems a garden in its loveliest dress
Before them, and behind a wilderness.
Famine, and Pestilence, her first-born son,
Attend to finish what the sword begun;
And echoing praises, such as fiends might earn,
And Folly pays, resound at your return.
A calm succeeds—but Plenty, with her train
Of heart-felt joys, succeeds not soon again,
And years of pining indigence must show
What scourges are the gods that rule below.
  Yet man, laborious man, by slow degrees,
(Such is his thirst of opulence and ease,)
Plies all the sinews of industrious toil,
Gleans up the refuse of the general spoil,
Rebuilds the towers that smoked upon the plain,
And the sun gilds the shining spires again.
  Increasing commerce and reviving art
Renew the quarrel on the conqueror's part;
And the sad lesson must be learn'd once more,
That wealth within is ruin at the door.
What are ye, monarchs, laurel'd heroes, say,
But Ætnas of the suffering world ye sway?
Sweet Nature, stripp'd of her embroider'd robe,
Deplores the wasted regions of her globe;
And stands a witness at truth's awful bar,
To prove you there destroyers, as ye are.
  Oh, place me in some Heaven-protected isle,
Where Peace, and Equity, and Freedom smile;

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Where no volcano pours his fiery flood,
No crested warrior dips his plume in blood;
Where Power secures what Industry has won;
Where to succeed is not to be undone;
A land, that distant tyrants hate in vain,
In Britain's isle, beneath a George's reign.

THE POET, THE OYSTER, AND THE SENSITIVE PLANT.

An Oyster, cast upon the shore,
Was heard, though never heard before,
Complaining in a speech well worded—
And worthy thus to be recorded:—
"Ah, hapless wretch! condemn'd to dwell
For ever in my native shell;
Ordain'd to move when others please,
Not for my own content or ease;
But toss'd and buffeted about,
Now *in* the water and now *out*.
'Twere better to be born a stone,
Of ruder shape, and feeling none,
Than with a tenderness like mine,
And sensibilities so fine!
I envy that unfeeling Shrub,
Fast rooted against every rub."
The plant he meant grew not far off,
And felt the sneer with scorn enough;
Was hurt, disgusted, mortified,
And with asperity replied.
When, cry the botanists, and stare,
Did plants call'd sensitive grow there?
No matter when—a poet's muse is,
To make them grow just where she chooses.
"You shapeless nothing in a dish,
You that are but almost a fish,
I scorn your coarse insinuation,
And have most plentiful occasion
To wish myself the rock I view,
Or such another dolt as you:

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For many a grave and learned clerk,
And many a gay unletter'd spark,
With curious touch examines me,
If I can feel as well as he;
And when I bend, retire, and shrink,
Says—'Well, 'tis more than one would think!'
Thus life is spent (oh, fie upon 't!)
In being touch'd, and crying—'Don't!'"
  A Poet, in his evening walk,
O'erheard and check'd this idle talk.
"And your fine sense," he said, "and yours,
Whatever evil it endures,
Deserves not, if so soon offended,
Much to be pitied or commended.
Disputes, though short, are far too long,
Where both alike are in the wrong;
Your feelings in their full amount,
Are all upon your own account.
  "You, in your grotto-work enclosed,
Complain of being thus exposed;
Yet nothing feel in that rough coat,
Save when the knife is at your throat,
Wherever driven by wind or tide,
Exempt from every ill beside.
  "And as for you, my Lady Squeamish,
Who reckon every touch a blemish,
If all the plants that can be found
Embellishing the scene around,
Should droop and wither where they grow,
You would not feel at all—not you.
The noblest minds their virtue prove
By pity, sympathy, and love:
These, these are feelings truly fine,
And prove their owner half divine."
  His censure reach'd them as he dealt it,
And each by shrinking shew'd he felt it.

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TO THE

REV. W. CAWTHORNE UNWIN.

[With this poem Cowper closed his first volume. He wrote it in 1781, while engaged in correcting the proofs of the others, and appended it to the work as a tribute of affection.]

UNWIN, I should but ill repay
  The kindness of a friend,
Whose worth deserves as warm a lay
  As ever friendship penn'd,
Thy name omitted in a page,
That would reclaim a vicious age.

A union form'd, as mine with thee,
  Not rashly, nor in sport,
May be as fervent in degree,
  And faithful in its sort,
And may as rich in comfort prove,
As that of true fraternal love.

The bud inserted in the rind,
  The bud of peach or rose,
Adorns, though differing in its kind,
  The stock whereon it grows,
With flower as sweet, or fruit as fair,
  As if produced by Nature there.

Not rich, I render what I may,
  I seize thy name in haste,
And place it in this first essay,
  Lest it should prove the last.
'Tis where it should be—in a plan
That holds in view the good of man.

The poet's lyre, to fix his fame,
  Should be the poet's heart;
Affection lights a brighter flame
  Than ever blazed by art.
No muses on these lines attend,
I sink the poet in the friend.

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CATHARINA.

ADDRESSED TO MISS STAPLETON, AFTERWARDS MRS COURTNEY.

THE FIRST PART.

She came — she is gone — we have met —
And meet perhaps never again;
The sun of that moment is set,
And seems to have risen in vain.
Catharina has fled like a dream —
(So vanishes pleasure, alas!)
But has left a regret and esteem,
That will not so suddenly pass.

The last evening ramble we made,
Catharina, Maria, and I,
Our progress was often delay'd
By the nightingale warbling nigh.
We paused under many a tree,
And much she was charm'd with a tone
Less sweet to Maria and me,
Who had witness'd so lately her own.

My numbers that day she had sung,
And gave them a grace so divine,
As only her musical tongue
Could infuse into numbers of mine.
The longer I heard, I esteem'd
The work of my fancy the more,
And even to myself never seem'd
So tuneful a poet before.

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Though the pleasures of London exceed
In number the days of the year,
Catharina, did nothing impede,
Would feel herself happier here;
For the close woven arches of limes
On the banks of our river, I know,
Are sweeter to her many times
Than all that the city can show.

So it is, when the mind is endued
With a well judging taste from above,
Then, whether embellished or rude,
'Tis nature alone that we love.
The achievements of art may amuse,
May even our wonder excite,
But groves, hills, and valleys, diffuse
A lasting, a sacred delight.

Since then in the rural recess
Catharina alone can rejoice,
May it still be her lot to possess
The scene of her sensible choice!
To inhabit a mansion remote
From the clatter of street-pacing steeds,
And by Philomel's annual note
To measure the life that she leads.

With her book, and her voice, and her lyre,
To wing all her moments at home,
And with scenes that new rapture inspire
As oft as it suits her to roam,
She will have just the life she prefers,
With little to wish or to fear,
And ours will be pleasant as hers,
Might we view her enjoying it here.

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FRIENDSHIP.

[The original of this poem was composed while the translation of Madame Guyon occupied the author's attention, and, with that work, was presented to the Rev. Mr Bull, who subsequently published it, with the version of the French poetess. The piece, written as it now appears, was finished in 1780, as a conclusion for Cowper's first volume. This design, for some reason not explained, he abandoned, and the poem was not published till after his death.]

WHAT virtue, or what mental grace,
But men unqualified and base
  Will boast it their possession?
Profusion apes the noble part
Of liberality of heart,
  And dulness of discretion.

If every polish'd gem we find,
Illuminating heart or mind,
  Provoke to imitation;
No wonder friendship does the same,
That jewel of the purest flame,
  Or rather constellation.

No knave but boldly will pretend
The requisites that form a friend,
  A real and a sound one;
Nor any fool he would deceive,
But prove as ready to believe,
  And dream that he had found one.

Candid, and generous, and just,
Boys care but little whom they trust,
  An error soon corrected,—
For who but learns in riper years,
That man, when smoothest he appears,
  Is most to be suspected?

But here again a danger lies,
Lest, having misapplied our eyes,
  And taken trash for treasure,

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We should unwarily conclude
Friendship a false ideal good,
  A mere Utopian pleasure.

An acquisition rather rare
Is yet no subject of despair;
  Nor is it wise complaining,
If either on forbidden ground,
Or where it was not to be found,
  We sought without attaining.

No friendship will abide the test
That stands on sordid interest,
  Or mean self-love erected;
Nor such as may a while subsist,
Between the set and sensualist,
  For vicious ends connected.

Who seek a friend, should come disposed
To exhibit in full bloom disclosed
  The graces and the beauties
That form the character he seeks,
For 'tis a union that bespeaks
  Reciprocated duties.

Mutual attention is implied,
And equal truth on either side,
  And constantly supported;
'Tis senseless arrogance to accuse
Another of sinister views,
  Our own as much distorted.

But will sincerity suffice?
It is, indeed, above all price,
  And must be made the basis;
But every virtue of the soul
Must constitute the charming whole,
  All shining in their places.

A fretful temper will divide
The closest knot that may be tied,
  By ceaseless sharp corrosion;

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A temper passionate and fierce
May suddenly your joys disperse
At one immense explosion.

In vain the talkative unite
In hopes of permanent delight—
The secret just committed,
Forgetting its important weight,
They drop through mere desire to prate,
And by themselves outwitted.

How bright soe'er the prospect seems,
All thoughts of friendship are but dreams,
If envy chance to creep in;
An envious man, if you succeed,
May prove a dangerous foe indeed,
But not a friend worth keeping.

As envy pines at good possess'd,
So jealousy looks forth distress'd
On good, that seems approaching;
And, if success his steps attend,
Discerns a rival in a friend,
And hates him for encroaching.

Hence authors of illustrious name,
Unless belied by common fame,
Are sadly prone to quarrel,
To deem the wit a friend displays
A tax upon their own just praise,
And pluck each other's laurel.

A man renown'd for repartee
Will seldom scruple to make free
With friendship's finest feeling,
Will thrust a dagger to your breast,
And say he wounded you in jest,
By way of balm for healing.

Whoever keeps an open ear
For tattlers, will be sure to hear
The trumpet of contention;

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Aspersion is the babbler's trade,
To listen is to lend him aid,
  And rush into dissention.

A friendship that in frequent fits
Of controversial rage emits
  The sparks of disputation,
Like hand-in-hand insurance plates,
Most unavoidably creates
  The thought of conflagration.

Some fickle creatures boast a soul
True as a needle to the pole,
  Their humour yet so various —
They manifest their whole life through
The needle's deviations too,
  Their love is so precarious.

The great and small but rarely meet
On terms of amity complete;
  Plebeians must surrender
And yield so much to noble folk,
It is combining fire with smoke,
  Obscurity with splendour.

Some are so placid and serene,
(As Irish bogs are always green,)
  They sleep secure from waking;
And are indeed a bog, that bears
Your unparticipated cares
  Unmoved and without quaking.

Courtier and patriot cannot mix
Their heterogeneous politics
  Without an effervescence,
Like that of salts with lemon juice,
Which does not yet like that produce
  A friendly coalescence.

Religion should extinguish strife,
And make a calm of human life;
  But friends that chance to differ

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On points which God has left at large,
How freely will they meet and charge!
  No combatants are stiffer.

To prove at last my main intent
Needs no expense of argument,
  No cutting and contriving —
Seeking a real friend we seem
To adopt the chemist's golden dream,
  With still less hope of thriving.

Sometimes the fault is all our own,
Some blemish in due time made known
  By trespass or omission;
Sometimes occasion brings to light
Our friend's defect long hid from sight,
  And even from suspicion.

Then judge yourself, and prove your man
As circumspectly as you can,
  And, having made election,
Beware no negligence of yours,
Such as a friend but ill endures,
  Enfeeble his affection.

That secrets are a sacred trust,
That friends should be sincere and just,
  That constancy befits them,
Are observations on the case,
That savour much of commonplace,
  And all the world admits them.

But 'tis not timber, lead, and stone,
An architect requires alone
  To finish a fine building, —
The palace were but half complete,
If he could possibly forget
  The carving and the gilding.

The man that hails you Tom or Jack,
And proves by thumps upon your back
  How he esteems your merit,

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Is such a friend, that one had need
Be very much his friend indeed,
  To pardon or to bear it.

As similarity of mind,
Or something not to be defined,
  First fixes our attention;
So manners decent and polite,
The same we practised at first sight,
  Must save it from declension.

Some act upon this prudent plan,
"Say little and hear all you can."
  Safe policy, but hateful—
So barren sands imbibe the shower,
But render neither fruit nor flower,
  Unpleasant and ungrateful.

The man I trust, if shy to me,
Shall find me as reserved as he;
  No subterfuge or pleading
Shall win my confidence again;
I will by no means entertain
  A spy on my proceeding.

These samples—for, alas! at last
These are but samples, and a taste
  Of evils yet unmention'd—
May prove the task a task indeed,
In which 'tis much if we succeed,
  However well intention'd.

Pursue the search, and you will find
Good sense and knowledge of mankind
  To be at least expedient,
And, after summing all the rest,
Religion ruling in the breast
  A principal ingredient.

The noblest Friendship ever shown
The Saviour's history makes known,
  Though some have turn'd and turn'd it;

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And, whether being crazed or blind,
Or seeking with a biass'd mind,
  Have not, it seems, discern'd it.

O Friendship! if my soul forego
Thy dear delights while here below;
  To mortify and grieve me,
May I myself at last appear
Unworthy, base, and insincere,
  Or may my friend deceive me!

THE YEARLY DISTRESS,

OR TITHING TIME AT STOCK, IN ESSEX.

Verses addressed to a country clergyman complaining of the disagreeableness of the day annually appointed for receiving the dues at the parsonage. [Addressed to Mr Unwin, and written December, 1779. See Letter 39.]

Come, ponder well, for 'tis no jest,
  To laugh it would be wrong,
The troubles of a worthy priest
  The burden of my song.

This priest he merry is and blithe
  Three quarters of a year,
But oh! it cuts him like a scythe,
  When tithing time draws near.

He then is full of fright and fears,
  As one at point to die,
And long before the day appears
  He heaves up many a sigh.

For then the farmers come jog, jog,
  Along the miry road,
Each heart as heavy as a log,
  To make their payments good.

In sooth, the sorrow of such days
  Is not to be express'd,

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When he that takes and he that pays
  Are both alike distress'd.

Now all unwelcome at his gates
  The clumsy swains alight,
With rueful faces and bald pates—
  He trembles at the sight.

And well he may, for well he knows
  Each bumpkin of the clan,
Instead of paying what he owes,
  Will cheat him if he can.

So in they come—each makes his leg
  And flings his head before,
And looks as if he came to beg,
  And not to quit a score.

"And how does miss and madam do,
  The little boy and all?"
"All tight and well. And how do you,
  Good Mr What-d'ye-call?"

The dinner comes, and down they sit:
  Were e'er such hungry folk?
There's little talking, and no wit;
  It is no time to joke.

One wipes his nose upon his sleeve,
  One spits upon the floor,
Yet, not to give offence or grieve,
  Holds up the cloth before.

The punch goes round, and they are dull
  And lumpish still as ever;
Like barrels with their bellies full,
  They only weigh the heavier.

At length the busy time begins,
  "Come, neighbours, we must wag"—
The money chinks, down drop their chins,
  Each lugging out his bag.

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One talks of mildew and of frost,
  And one of storms of hail,
And one of pigs, that he has lost
  By maggots at the tail.

Quoth one, "A rarer man than you
  In pulpit none shall hear:
But yet, methinks, to tell you true,
  You sell it plaguy dear."

Oh, why are farmers made so coarse,
  Or clergy made so fine?
A kick, that scarce would move a horse,
  May kill a sound divine.

Then let the boobies stay at home;
  'T would cost him, I dare say,
Less trouble taking twice the sum
  Without the clowns that pay.

TO THE REV. MR NEWTON.

[Written in October, 1780, on his return from Ramsgate.]

THAT ocean you have late survey'd,
  Those rocks I too have seen;
But I, afflicted and dismay'd,
  You tranquil and serene.

You from the flood-controlling steep
  Saw stretch'd before your view,
With conscious joy, the threatening deep,
  No longer such to you.

To me, the waves that ceaseless broke
  Upon the dangerous coast,
Hoarsely and ominously spoke
  Of all my treasure lost.

Your sea of troubles you have past,
  And found a peaceful shore;
I tempest toss'd, and wreck'd at last,
  Come home to port no more.

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TO SIR JOSHUA REYNOLDS.

[" A poetical effort of the predictive kind," as the poet sportively calls this piece, composed in the beginning of 1781. The allusions to the American Senate and United Provinces, and to the armed neutrality in Europe, are sufficiently obvious.]

DEAR president, whose art sublime
Gives perpetuity to time,
And bids transactions of a day,
That fleeting hours would waft away
To dark futurity, survive,
And in unfading beauty live,—
You cannot with a grace decline
A special mandate of the Nine—
Yourself, whatever task you choose,
So much indebted to the muse.

Thus say the Sisterhood,—We come—
Fix well your palette on your thumb,
Prepare the pencil and the tints—
We come to furnish you with hints.
French disappointment, British glory,
Must be the subject of the story.

First strike a curve, a graceful bow,
Then slope it to a point below;
Your outline easy, airy, light,
Fill'd up becomes a paper kite.
Let independence, sanguine, horrid,
Blaze like a meteor in the forehead:
Beneath (but lay aside your graces)
Draw *six-and-twenty rueful faces*,
Each with a staring, steadfast eye,
Fix'd on his great and good ally.
France flies the kite,—'tis on the wing—
Britannia's lightning cuts the string:
The wind that raised it, ere it ceases,
Just rends it into thirteen pieces,
Takes charge of every fluttering sheet,
And lays them all at George's feet.

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Iberia, trembling from afar,
Renounces the confederate war.
Her efforts and her arts o'ercome,
France calls her shatter'd navies home:
Repenting Holland learns to mourn
The sacred treaties she has torn;
Astonishment and awe profound
Are stamp'd upon the nations round;
Without one friend, above all foes,
Britannia gives the world repose.

TO MRS NEWTON.

September 16, 1781.

A NOBLE theme demands a noble verse,
In such I thank you for your fine oy*sters*.
The barrel was magnificently large,
But being sent to Olney at free charge,
Was not inserted in the driver's list,
And therefore overlook'd, forgot, or miss'd;
For when the messenger whom we despatch'd
Inquired for oysters, Hob his noddle scratch'd;
Denying that his wagon or his wain
Did any such commodity contain.
In consequence of which, your welcome boon
Did not arrive till yesterday at noon;
In consequence of which some chanced to die,
And some, though very sweet, were very dry.
Now Madam says, (and what she says must still
Deserve attention, say she what she will,)
That what we call the Diligence, be-*case*
It goes to London with a swifter pace,
Would better suit the carriage of your gift,
Returning downward with a pace as swift;
And therefore recommends it with this aim—
To save at least three days,—the price the same;
For though it will not carry or convey
For less than twelve pence, send whate'er you may
For oysters bred upon the salt sea shore,
Pack'd in a barrel, they will charge no more.

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News have I none that I can deign to write,
Save that it rain'd prodigiously last night;
And that ourselves were, at the seventh hour,
Caught in the first beginning of the shower;
But walking, running, and with much ado,
Got home—just time enough to be wet through.
Yet both are well, and, wondrous to be told,
Soused as we were, we yet have caught no cold;
And wishing just the same good hap to you,
We say, good Madam, and good Sir, Adieu!

THE FLATTING-MILL.

AN ILLUSTRATION.

[Written "on the shortest day," 1781; and originally intended for an introduction to one of the pieces in the poet's first publication, where, however, it did not appear.]

When a bar of pure silver or ingot of gold
Is sent to be flatted or wrought into length,
It is pass'd between cylinders often, and roll'd
In an engine of utmost mechanical strength.

Thus tortured and squeezed, at last it appears
Like a loose heap of ribbon, a glittering show,
Like music it tinkles and rings in your ears,
And warm'd by the pressure is all in a glow.

This process achieved, it is doom'd to sustain
The thump-after-thump of a gold-beater's mallet,
And at last is of service in sickness or pain
To cover a pill from a delicate palate.

Alas for the Poet! who dares undertake
To urge reformation of national ill—
His head and his heart are both likely to ache
With the double employment of mallet and mill.

If he wish to instruct, he must learn to delight,
Smooth, ductile, and even, his fancy must flow,
Must tinkle and glitter like gold to the sight,
And catch in its progress a sensible glow.

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After all he must beat it as thin and as fine
As the leaf that enfolds what an invalid swallows,
For truth is unwelcome, however divine,
And unless you adorn it, a nausea follows.

LOVE ABUSED.

What is there in the vale of life
Half so delightful as a wife,
When friendship, love, and peace combine
To stamp the marriage-bond divine?
The stream of pure and genuine love
Derives its current from above;
And earth a second Eden shows,
Where'er the healing water flows:
But ah, if from the dykes and drains
Of sensual nature's feverish veins,
Lust, like a lawless headstrong flood,
Impregnated with ooze and mud,
Descending fast on every side
Once mingles with the sacred tide,
Farewell the soul-enlivening scene!
The banks that wore a smiling green,
With rank defilement overspread,
Bewail their flowery beauties dead.
The stream polluted, dark, and dull,
Diffused into a Stygian pool,
Through life's last melancholy years
Is fed with ever-flowing tears:
Complaints supply the zephyr's part,
And sighs that heave a breaking heart.

A POETICAL EPISTLE TO LADY AUSTEN.

December 17, 1781.

[These verses, in which ease, grace, and tenderness are so delightfully blended, were addressed to Lady Austen, while residing in London, during the interval between her first and second visit to Olney. The original is dated December 17, 1781.]

Dear Anna,—between friend and friend
Prose answers every common end;

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Serves, in a plain and homely way,
To express the occurrence of the day;
Our health, the weather, and the news;
What walks we take, what books we choose;
And all the floating thoughts we find
Upon the surface of the mind.

But when a poet takes the pen,
Far more alive than other men
He feels a gentle tingling come
Down to his finger and his thumb,
Derived from Nature's noblest part,
The centre of a glowing heart:
And this is what the world, who knows
No flights above the pitch of prose,
His more sublime vagaries slighting,
Denominates an itch for writing.
No wonder I, who scribble rhyme
To catch the triflers of the time,
And tell them truths divine and clear,
Which, couch'd in prose, they will not hear;
Who labour hard to allure and draw
The loiterers I never saw,
Should feel that itching, and that tingling,
With all my purpose intermingling,
To your intrinsic merit true,
When call'd to address myself to you.

Mysterious are His ways, whose power
Brings forth that unexpected hour,
When minds that never met before,
Shall meet, unite, and part no more:
It is the allotment of the skies,
The hand of the Supremely Wise,
That guides and governs our affections,
And plans and orders our connections:
Directs us in our distant road,
And marks the bounds of our abode.
Thus we were settled when you found us,
Peasants and children all around us,

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Not dreaming of so dear a friend,
Deep in the abyss of Silver-End.*
Thus Martha, even against her will,
Perch'd on the top of yonder hill;
And you, though you must needs prefer
The fairer scenes of sweet Sancerre,†
Are come from distant Loire, to choose
A cottage on the banks of Ouse.
This page of Providence quite new,
And now just opening to our view,
Employs our present thoughts and pains
To guess, and spell what it contains:
But day by day, and year by year,
Will make the dark enigma clear;
And furnish us, perhaps, at last,
Like other scenes already past,
With proof, that we, and our affairs,
Are part of a Jehovah's cares:
For God unfolds by slow degrees,
The purport of his deep decrees;
Sheds every hour a clearer light
In aid of our defective sight;
And spreads, at length, before the soul
A beautiful and perfect whole,
Which busy man's inventive brain
Toils to anticipate, in vain.

Say, Anna, had you never known
The beauties of a rose full blown,
Could you, though luminous your eye,
By looking on the bud, descry,
Or guess with a prophetic power,
The future splendour of the flower?
Just so, the Omnipotent, who turns
The system of a world's concerns,
From mere minutiæ can educe
Events of most important use;
And bid a dawning sky display
The blaze of a meridian day.

* An obscure part of Olney, near Cowper's residence.
† Lady Austen's residence in France.

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The works of man tend, one and all,
As needs they must, from great to small;
And vanity absorbs at length
The monuments of human strength.
But who can tell how vast the plan
Which this day's incident began?
Too small, perhaps, the slight occasion
For our dim-sighted observation;
It pass'd unnoticed as the bird
That cleaves the yielding air unheard,
And yet may prove, when understood,
An harbinger of endless good.

Not that I deem, or mean to call
Friendship a blessing cheap or small:
But merely to remark, that ours,
Like some of Nature's sweetest flowers,
Rose from a seed of tiny size,
That seem'd to promise no such prize;
A transient visit intervening,
And made almost without a meaning,
(Hardly the effect of inclination,
Much less of pleasing expectation,)
Produced a friendship, then begun,
That has cemented us in one;
And placed it in our power to prove,
By long fidelity and love,
That Solomon has wisely spoken, —
"A threefold cord is not soon broken."

FROM

A LETTER TO THE REV. MR NEWTON.

(DATED MAY 28, 1782.)

[The original was addressed to the Rev. Mr Newton, a great smoker, as appears from the Poet's letters.]

SAYS the pipe to the snuff-box, "I can't understand
What the ladies and gentlemen see in your face,
That you are in fashion all over the land,
And I am so much fallen into disgrace.

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"Do but see what a pretty contemplative air
I give to the company — pray do but note 'em —
You would think that the wise men of Greece were all there,
Or, at least, would suppose them the wise men of Gotham.

"My breath is as sweet as the breath of blown roses,
While you are a nuisance where'er you appear;
There is nothing but sniveling and blowing of noses,
Such a noise as turns any man's stomach to hear."

Then lifting his lid in a delicate way,
And opening his mouth with a smile quite engaging,
The box in reply was heard plainly to say,
"What a silly dispute is this we are waging!

"If you have a little of merit to claim,
You may thank the sweet-smelling Virginian weed,
And I, if I seem to deserve any blame,
The before-mentioned drug in apology plead.

"Thus neither the praise nor the blame is our own,
No room for a sneer, much less a cachinnus,
We are vehicles, not of tobacco alone,
But of any thing else they may choose to put in us."

TO THE REV. WILLIAM BULL.

June 22, 1782.

MY DEAR FRIEND,

If reading verse be your delight,
'Tis mine as much, or more, to write;
But what we would, so weak is man,
Lies oft remote from what we can.
For instance, at this very time,
I feel a wish, by cheerful rhyme,
To soothe my friend, and, had I power,
To cheat him of an anxious hour;
Not meaning (for I must confess,
It were but folly to suppress,)

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His pleasure, or his good alone,
But squinting partly at my own.
But though the sun is flaming high
I' the centre of yon arch, the sky,
And he had once (and who but he?)
The name for setting genius free,
Yet whether poets of past days
Yielded him undeserved praise,
And he by no uncommon lot
Was famed for virtues he had not;
Or whether, which is like enough,
His highness may have taken huff,
So seldom sought with invocation,
Since it has been the reigning fashion
To disregard his inspiration,
I seem no brighter in my wits,
For all the radiance he emits,
Than if I saw, through midnight vapour,
The glimmering of a farthing taper.
Oh, for a succedaneum, then,
To accelerate a creeping pen!
Oh, for a ready succedaneum,
Quod caput, cerebrum, et cranium
Pondere liberet exoso,
Et morbo jam caliginoso!
'Tis here; this oval box, well fill'd
With best tobacco, finely mill'd,
Beats all Anticyra's pretences
To disengage the encumber'd senses.
Oh, Nymph of Transatlantic fame,
Where'er thine haunt, whate'er thy name,
Whether reposing on the side
Of Oroonoquo's spacious tide,
Or listening with delight not small
To Niagara's distant fall,
'Tis thine to cherish and to feed
The pungent nose-refreshing weed,
Which, whether pulverized it gain
A speedy passage to the brain,
Or whether, touch'd with fire, it rise
In circling eddies to the skies,

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Does thought more quicken and refine
Than all the breath of all the Nine—
Forgive the Bard, if Bard he be
Who once too wantonly made free,
To touch with a satiric wipe
That symbol of thy power, the pipe;
So may no blight infest thy plains,
And no unseasonable rains,
And so may smiling peace once more
Visit America's sad shore;
And thou, secure from all alarms,
Of thundering drums, and glittering arms,
Rove unconfined beneath the shade
Thy wide expanded leaves have made;
So may thy votaries increase,
And fumigation never cease.
May Newton with renew'd delights
Perform thine odoriferous rites,
While clouds of incense, half divine,
Involve thy disappearing shrine;
And so may smoke-inhaling Bull
Be always filling, never full.

THE COLUBRIAD.

[The title is from *coluber*, a snake. The piece is a mock heroic recital of a real event. See Letter 108.]

Close by the threshold of a door nail'd fast
Three kittens sat; each kitten look'd aghast.
I passing swift and inattentive by,
At the three kittens cast a careless eye;
Not much concern'd to know what they did there,
Not deeming kittens worth a poet's care.
But presently a loud and furious hiss
Caused me to stop, and to exclaim, "What 's this?"
When lo! upon the threshold met my view,
With head erect, and eyes of fiery hue,
A viper, long as Count de Grasse's queue.
Forth from his head his forked tongue he throws,
Darting it full against a kitten's nose;
Who having never seen, in field or house,

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The like, sat still and silent as a mouse:
Only projecting, with attention due,
Her whisker'd face, she ask'd him, "Who are you?"
On to the hall went I, with pace not slow,
But swift as lightning, for a long Dutch hoe:
With which well arm'd I hasten'd to the spot,
To find the viper, but I found him not.
And turning up the leaves, and shrubs around,
Found only, that he was not to be found.
But still the kittens sitting as before,
Sat watching close the bottom of the door.
"I hope," said I, "the villain I would kill,
Has slipp'd between the door, and the door sill;
And if I make despatch, and follow hard,
No doubt but I shall find him in the yard;"
For long ere now it should have been rehearsed,
'Twas in the garden that I found him first.
Even there I found him—there the full-grown cat
His head, with velvet paw, did gently pat;
As curious as the kittens erst had been
To learn what this phenomenon might mean.
Fill'd with heroic ardour at the sight,
And fearing every moment he would bite,
And rob our household of our only cat,
That was of age to combat with a rat;
With outstretch'd hoe I slew him at the door,
And taught him NEVER TO COME THERE NO MORE.

ON THE LOSS OF THE ROYAL GEORGE.

WRITTEN WHEN THE NEWS ARRIVED.

(SEPTEMBER, 1782.)

To the march in Scipio.

[On the 12th of August, 1782, the Royal George, being on the heel at Portsmouth, suddenly upset and went down, when all on board, including visiters, more than eight hundred souls, perished. Nine days afterwards the bodies of many of these unfortunate sufferers floated; at Portsea thirty-five corpses were washed ashore, and buried in one grave, over which a marble monument has been erected detailing these particulars. The accident appears to have

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been occasioned by an injudicious arrangement of the guns, which brought the centre of gravity and centre of buoyancy too near, and in the same vertical line. Hence, on the flowing of the tide, the ship fell over to one side, the lower parts filled, and she went down instantly. Had the upper deck guns been run out, instead of being braced right inwards, the accident would have been prevented—of such importance is general science to men in all situations. This noble lyric, composed at the suggestion of Lady Austen, was written in the September following.]

TOLL for the brave!
  The brave that are no more!
All sunk beneath the wave,
  Fast by their native shore!

Eight hundred of the brave,
  Whose courage well was tried,
Had made the vessel heel,
  And laid her on her side.

A land breeze shook the shrouds,
  And she was overset;
Down went the Royal George,
  With all her crew complete.

Toll for the brave!
  Brave Kempenfelt is gone;
His last sea-fight is fought;
  His work of glory done.

It was not in the battle;
  No tempest gave the shock;
She sprang no fatal leak;
  She ran upon no rock.

His sword was in its sheath;
  His fingers held the pen,
When Kempenfelt went down,
  With twice four hundred men.

Weigh the vessel up,
  Once dreaded by our foes!
And mingle with our cup
  The tear that England owes.

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Her timbers yet are sound,
And she may float again,
Full charged with England's thunder,
And plough the distant main.

But Kempenfelt is gone,
His victories are o'er;
And he and his eight hundred,
Shall plough the wave no more.

THE DIVERTING

HISTORY OF JOHN GILPIN;

SHOWING HOW HE WENT FARTHER THAN HE INTENDED, AND CAME SAFE HOME AGAIN.

[For this inimitable poem the world is indebted to Lady Austen, as detailed in the Life of the poet. At the request of Mrs Unwin it was first published anonymously in the *Public Advertiser*. Gilpin's adventures immediately became exceedingly popular,—were copied into all the periodicals of the time, vended in the streets, represented in caricatures, and recited in public by Henderson. "In short," observes the author, "I have but two rivals in the public estimation, Mrs Bellamy and the learned pig." But while the fame of his production was thus universal, a few of his intimate friends only were in the secret, and on Cowper publishing the first authentic edition in his second volume, all were surprised, and some of the serious absurdly offended. Much representation has been hitherto entertained on this point, as if Cowper himself had been weak enough to have religiously lamented an innocent, though mirthful composition, and to have regarded as a deadly sin the publication of the following poem. Of this step he has, indeed, thought a vindication necessary, stating that he left it entirely to his publisher to insert the poem or not. At the same time, he repeatedly remarks to Newton, whose ill-timed officiousness intruded the defence upon him, that whatever tended to recommend the volume to notice would prove useful to truth and religion in the end.]

John Gilpin was a citizen
Of credit and renown,
A train-band captain eke was he
Of famous London town.

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John Gilpin's spouse said to her dear,
  "Though wedded we have been
These twice ten tedious years, yet we
  No holiday have seen.

"To-morrow is our wedding-day,
  And we will then repair
Unto the Bell at Edmonton
  All in a chaise and pair.

"My sister and my sister's child,
  Myself, and children three,
Will fill the chaise; so you must ride
  On horseback after we."

He soon replied, "I do admire
  Of womankind but one,
And you are she, my dearest dear,
  Therefore it shall be done.

"I am a linendraper bold,
  As all the world doth know,
And my good friend the calender
  Will lend his horse to go."

Quoth Mrs Gilpin, "That 's well said;
  And for that wine is dear,
We will be furnish'd with our own,
  Which is both bright and clear."

John Gilpin kiss'd his loving wife;
  O'erjoy'd was he to find,
That, though on pleasure she was bent,
  She had a frugal mind.

The morning came, the chaise was brought,
  But yet was not allow'd
To drive up to the door, lest all
  Should say that she was proud.

So three doors off the chaise was stay'd,
  Where they did all get in;
Six precious souls, and all agog
  To dash through thick and thin.

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Smack went the whip, round went the wheels,
  Were never folk so glad,
The stones did rattle underneath,
  As if Cheapside were mad.

John Gilpin at his horse's side
  Seized fast the flowing mane,
And up he got in haste to ride,
  But soon came down again;

For saddle-tree scarce reach'd had he,
  His journey to begin,
When, turning round his head, he saw
  Three customers come in.

So down he came; for loss of time,
  Although it grieved him sore,
Yet loss of pence, full well he knew,
  Would trouble him much more.

'Twas long before the customers
  Were suited to their mind,
When Betty, screaming, came down stairs,
  "The wine is left behind!"

"Good lack!" quoth he—"yet bring it me,
  My leathern belt likwise,
In which I bear my trusty sword,
  When I do exercise."

Now Mrs Gilpin (careful soul!)
  Had two stone bottles found,
To hold the liquor that she loved,
  And keep it safe and sound.

Each bottle had a curling ear,
  Through which the belt he drew,
And hung a bottle on each side,
  To make his balance true.

Then over all, that he might be
  Equipp'd from top to toe,
His long red cloak, well brush'd and neat,
  He manfully did throw.

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Now see him mounted once again
  Upon his nimble steed,
Full slowly pacing o'er the stones,
  With caution and good heed.

But finding soon a smoother road
  Beneath his well-shod feet,
The snorting beast began to trot,
  Which gall'd him in his seat.

So, "Fair and softly," John he cried,
  But John he cried in vain;
That trot became a gallop soon,
  In spite of curb and rein.

So stooping down, as needs he must
  Who cannot sit upright,
He grasp'd the mane with both his hands,
  And eke with all his might.

His horse, who never in that sort
  Had handled been before,
What thing upon his back had got
  Did wonder more and more.

Away went Gilpin, neck or nought;
  Away went hat and wig;
He little dreamt, when he set out,
  Of running such a rig.

The wind did blow, the cloak did fly,
  Like streamer long and gay,
Till, loop and button failing both,
  At last it flew away.

Then might all people well discern
  The bottles he had slung:
A bottle swinging at each side,
  As hath been said or sung.

The dogs did bark, the children scream'd,
  Up flew the windows all;
And every soul cried out, "Well done!"
  As loud as he could bawl.

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Away went Gilpin—who but he?
  His fame soon spread around,
"He carries weight! he rides a race!
  'Tis for a thousand pound!"

And still, as fast as he drew near,
  'Twas wonderful to view,
How in a trice the turnpike men
  Their gates wide open threw.

And now, as he went bowing down
  His reeking head full low,
The bottles twain behind his back
  Were shatter'd at a blow.

Down ran the wine into the road,
  Most piteous to be seen,
Which made his horse's flanks to smoke
  As they had basted been.

But still he seem'd to carry weight,
  With leathern girdle braced;
For all might see the bottle necks
  Still dangling at his waist.

Thus all through merry Islington
  These gambols he did play,
Until he came unto the Wash
  Of Edmonton so gay;

And there he threw the wash about
  On both sides of the way,
Just like unto a trundling mop,
  Or a wild goose at play.

At Edmonton his loving wife
  From the balcony spied
Her tender husband, wondering much
  To see how he did ride.

"Stop, stop, John Gilpin!—Here 's the house"—
  They all aloud did cry;
"The dinner waits, and we are tired;"
  Said Gilpin,—"So am I!"

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But yet his horse was not a whit
  Inclined to tarry there;
For why?—his owner had a house
  Full ten miles off, at Ware.

So like an arrow swift he flew
  Shot by an archer strong;
So did he fly—which brings me to
  The middle of my song.

Away went Gilpin out of breath,
  And sore against his will,
Till at his friend the calender's
  His horse at last stood still.

The calender, amazed to see
  His neighbour in such trim,
Laid down his pipe, flew to the gate,
  And thus accosted him:

"What news? what news? your tidings tell;
  Tell me you must and shall—
Say why bareheaded you are come,
  Or why you come at all?"

Now Gilpin had a pleasant wit,
  And loved a timely joke;
And thus unto the calender
  In merry guise he spoke:

"I came because your horse would come;
  And, if I well forebode,
My hat and wig will soon be here,
  They are upon the road."

The calender right glad to find
  His friend in merry pin,
Return'd him not a single word,
  But to the house went in;

Whence straight he came with hat and wig;
  A wig that flow'd behind,
A hat not much the worse for wear,
  Each comely in its kind.

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He held them up, and in his turn
  Thus shew'd his ready wit,
"My head is twice as big as yours,
  They therefore needs must fit.

"But let me scrape the dirt away,
  That hangs upon your face;
And stop and eat, for well you may
  Be in a hungry case."

Said John, "It is my wedding-day,
  And all the world would stare,
If wife should dine at Edmonton,
  And I should dine at Ware."

So turning to his horse, he said,
  "I am in haste to dine;
'Twas for your pleasure you came here,
  You shall go back for mine."

Ah luckless speech, and bootless boast!
  For which he paid full dear;
For, while he spake, a braying ass
  Did sing most loud and clear;

Whereat his horse did snort, as he
  Had heard a lion roar,
And gallop'd off with all his might
  As he had done before.

Away went Gilpin, and away
  Went Gilpin's hat and wig:
He lost them sooner than at first,
  For why?—they were too big.

Now Mrs Gilpin, when she saw
  Her husband posting down
Into the country far away,
  She pull'd out half a crown;

And thus unto the youth she said,
  That drove them to the Bell,
"This shall be yours, when you bring back
  My husband safe and well."

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The youth did ride, and soon did meet
  John coming back amain;
Whom in a trice he tried to stop,
  By catching at his rein;

But not performing what he meant,
  And gladly would have done,
The frighted steed he frighted more,
  And made him faster run.

Away went Gilpin, and away
  Went postboy at his heels,
The postboy's horse right glad to miss
  The lumbering of the wheels.

Six gentlemen upon the road,
  Thus seeing Gilpin fly,
With postboy scampering in the rear,
  They raised the hue and cry:—

"Stop thief! stop thief!—a highwayman!"
  Not one of them was mute;
And all and each that pass'd that way
  Did join in the pursuit.

And now the turnpike gates again
  Flew open in short space;
The toll-men thinking as before,
  That Gilpin rode a race.

And so he did, and won it too,
  For he got first to town;
Nor stopp'd till where he had got up
  He did again get down.

Now let us sing, long live the king,
  And Gilpin, long live he;
And, when he next doth ride abroad,
  May I be there to see!

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SONG ON PEACE.

[This and the following were composed at the request of Lady Austen in the summer of 1783.]

AIR—"*My fond shepherds of late,*" *&c.*

No longer I follow a sound;
  No longer a dream I pursue;
O happiness! not to be found,
  Unattainable treasure, adieu!

I have sought thee in splendour and dress,
  In the regions of pleasure and taste;
I have sought thee, and seem'd to possess,
  But have proved thee a vision at last.

An humble ambition and hope
  The voice of true wisdom inspires;
'Tis sufficient, if Peace be the scope,
  And the summit of all our desires.

Peace may be the lot of the mind
  That seeks it in meekness and love;
But rapture and bliss are confined
  To the glorified spirits above.

ANOTHER.

AIR—"*The Lass of Patie's Mill.*"

WHEN all within is peace,
  How Nature seems to smile!
Delights that never cease,
  The live-long day beguile.
From morn to dewy eve,
  With open hand she showers
Fresh blessings to deceive
  And sooth the silent hours.

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It is content of heart
  Gives Nature power to please;
The mind that feels no smart,
  Enlivens all it sees;
Can make a wintry sky
  Seem bright as smiling May,
And evening's closing eye
  As peep of early day.

The vast majestic globe,
  So beauteously array'd
In Nature's various robe,
  With wondrous skill display'd,
Is to a mourner's heart
  A dreary wild at best;
It flutters to depart,
  And longs to be at rest.

THE ROSE.

[Published in the Gentleman's Magazine for August, 1785, but written in June, 1783. The domestic trait so beautifully touched in this little piece occurred on a Wednesday evening, when the Poet, on returning from a walk, rashly, as he describes, snapped the dewy flower which Mrs Unwin had just presented to Lady Austen.]

The rose had been wash'd, just wash'd in a shower,
  Which Mary to Anna convey'd,
The plentiful moisture encumber'd the flower,
  And weigh'd down its beautiful head.

The cup was all fill'd, and the leaves were all wet,
  And it seem'd to a fanciful view,
To weep for the buds it had left with regret,
  On the flourishing bush where it grew.

I hastily seized it, unfit as it was
  For a nosegay, so dripping and drown'd,
And swinging it rudely, too rudely, alas!
  I snapp'd it — it fell to the ground.

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And such, I exclaim'd, is the pitiless part
Some act by the delicate mind,
Regardless of wringing and breaking a heart
Already to sorrow resign'd.

This elegant rose, had I shaken it less,
Might have bloom'd with its owner a while;
And the tear, that is wiped with a little address,
May be follow'd perhaps by a smile.

THE FAITHFUL FRIEND.

[Written in August, 1783, on a circumstance described with equal felicity in prose in the Poet's letters of that date. In the title the author writes sometimes *bird*, sometimes *friend*.]

The greenhouse is my summer seat:
My shrubs displaced from that retreat
Enjoy'd the open air;
Two goldfinches, whose sprightly song
Had been their mutual solace long,
Lived happy prisoners there.

They sang, as blithe as finches sing,
That flutter loose on golden wing,
And frolic where they list;
Strangers to liberty, 'tis true,
But that delight they never knew,
And therefore never miss'd.

But Nature works in every breast;
Instinct is never quite suppress'd;
And Dick felt some desires,
Which, after many an effort vain,
Instructed him at length to gain
A pass between his wires.

The open window seem'd to invite
The freeman to a farewell flight;
But Tom was still confined;

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And Dick, although his way was clear,
Was much too generous and sincere
  To leave his friend behind.

For, settling on his grated roof,
He chirp'd and kiss'd him, giving proof
  That he desired no more;
Nor would forsake his cage at last,
Till, gently seized, I shut him fast,
  A prisoner as before.

O ye, who never knew the joys,
Of Friendship, satisfied with noise,
  Fandango, ball, and rout!
Blush, when I tell you how a bird,
A prison with a friend preferr'd
  To liberty without.

VALEDICTION.

[Composed in November, 1783, and occasioned by the neglect with which his two early friends, Colman, and especially Chancellor Thurlow, treated the Poet's first volume, to each of whom he sent a copy; a compliment which neither acknowledged. The seeming disrespect, though afterwards explained to his satisfaction, caused him much pain, and some of the suppressed verses shew that he felt with becoming dignity, as for instance—

> Forgetful of the man whom once ye chose,
> Cold in his cause, and careless of his woes!
> I bid you both a long and last adieu,—
> *Cold* in my turn, and unconcern'd as you!

See Letter to Colman, No. 200, December 27, 1785.]

O Friendship! cordial of the human breast!
So little felt, so fervently profess'd!
Thy blossoms deck our unsuspecting years;
The promise of delicious fruit appears:
We hug the hopes of constancy and truth,
Such is the folly of our dreaming youth;
But soon, alas! detect the rash mistake,
That sanguine inexperience loves to make;
And view with tears the expected harvest lost,
Decay'd by time, or wither'd by a frost.

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Whoever undertakes a friend's great part
Should be renew'd in nature, pure in heart,
Prepared for martyrdom, and strong to prove
A thousand ways the force of genuine love.
He may be call'd to give up health and gain,
To exchange content for trouble, ease for pain,
To echo sigh for sigh, and groan for groan,
And wet his cheeks with sorrows not his own.
The heart of man, for such a task too frail,
When most relied on, is most sure to fail;
And, summon'd to partake its fellow's wo,
Starts from its office, like a broken bow.
Votaries of business, and of pleasure, prove
Faithless alike in friendship and in love.
Retired from all the circles of the gay,
And all the crowds, that bustle life away,
To scenes, where competition, envy, strife,
Beget no thunder-clouds to trouble life,
Let me, the charge of some good angel, find
One, who has known, and has escaped mankind;
Polite, yet virtuous, who has brought away
The manners, not the morals, of the day:
With him, perhaps with *her*, (for men have known
No firmer friendships than the fair have shown)
Let me enjoy, in some unthought-of spot,
All former friends forgiven and forgot,
Down to the close of life's fast fading scene,
Union of hearts, without a flaw between.
'Tis grace, 'tis bounty, and it calls for praise,
If God give health, that sunshine of our days!
And if he add, a blessing shared by few,
Content of heart, more praises still are due—
But if he grant a friend, that boon possess'd
Indeed is treasure, and crowns all the rest;
And giving one, whose heart is in the skies,
Born from above, and made divinely wise,
He gives, what bankrupt nature never can,
Whose noblest coin is light and brittle man,
Gold, purer far than Ophir ever knew,
A soul, an image of himself, and therefore true.

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PAIRING TIME ANTICIPATED.

A FABLE.

[The severe and long-continued winter of 1783-4, appears to have suggested this sprightly and elegant fable.]

I SHALL not ask Jean Jacques Rousseau *
If birds confabulate or no;
'Tis clear, that they were always able
To hold discourse, at least in fable;
And e'en the child, who knows no better
Than to interpret by the letter,
A story of a cock and bull,
Must have a most uncommon skull.
It chanced then on a winter's day,
But warm, and bright, and calm as May,
The birds, conceiving a design
To forestal sweet St Valentine,
In many an orchard, copse, and grove,
Assembled on affairs of love,
And with much twitter and much chatter,
Began to agitate the matter.
At length a Bulfinch, who could boast
More years and wisdom than the most,
Entreated, opening wide his beak,
A moment's liberty to speak;
And, silence publicly enjoin'd,
Deliver'd briefly thus his mind:
"My friends! be cautious how ye treat
The subject upon which we meet;
I fear we shall have winter yet."
A Finch, whose tongue knew no control,
With golden wing and satin poll,
A last year's bird, who ne'er had tried
What marriage means, thus pert replied:

* It was one of the whimsical speculations of this philosopher, that all fables which ascribe reason and speech to animals should be withheld from children, as being only vehicles of deception. But what child was ever deceived by them, or can be, against the evidence of his senses?—*Author's note.*

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"Methinks the gentleman," quoth she,
"Opposite in the apple-tree,
By his good will would keep us single
Till yonder heaven and earth shall mingle,
Or (which is likelier to befall)
Till death exterminate us all.
I marry without more ado:
My dear Dick Redcap, what say you?"
Dick heard, and tweedling, ogling, bridling,
Turning short round, strutting and sideling,
Attested, glad, his approbation
Of an immediate conjugation.
Their sentiments so well express'd
Influenced mightily the rest,
All pair'd, and each pair built a nest.
But though the birds were thus in haste,
The leaves came on not quite so fast,
And Destiny, that sometimes bears
An aspect stern on man's affairs,
Not altogether smiled on theirs.
The wind, of late breathed gently forth,
Now shifted east, and east by north;
Bare trees and shrubs but ill, you know,
Could shelter them from rain or snow,
Stepping into their nests, they paddled,
Themselves were chill'd, their eggs were addled;
Soon every father bird and mother
Grew quarrelsome, and peck'd each other,
Parted without the least regret,
Except that they had ever met,
And learn'd in future to be wiser,
Than to neglect a good adviser.

MORAL.

Misses! the tale that I relate
This lesson seems to carry,—
Choose not alone a proper mate,
But proper time to marry.

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AN EPISTLE TO JOSEPH HILL, ESQ.

[First printed in Cowper's second volume. His motives for the insertion of this "truly Horatian" composition are explained in the following extract from a private letter to Mr Hill:—"You do me justice when you ascribe my printed Epistle to you to my friendship for you, though, in fact, it was equally owing to the opinion that I have of yours for me. Having, in one part or other of my two volumes, distinguished by name the majority of those few for whom I entertain a friendship, it seemed to me that it would be unjustifiable negligence to omit yourself; and if I took that step without communicating to you my intention, it was only to gratify myself the more, with the hope of surprising you agreeably." 1784.]

Dear Joseph,—Five-and-twenty years ago—
Alas, how time escapes!—'tis even so—
With frequent intercourse, and always sweet,
And always friendly, we were wont to cheat
A tedious hour—and now we never meet!
As some grave gentleman in Terence says
('Twas therefore much the same in ancient days,)
Good lack, we know not what to-morrow brings—
Strange fluctuation of all human things!
True. Changes will befall, and friends may part,
But distance only cannot change the heart:
And, were I call'd to prove the assertion true,
One proof should serve—a reference to you.
Whence comes it, then, that in the wane of life,
Though nothing have occurr'd to kindle strife,
We find the friends we fancied we had won,
Though numerous once, reduced to few or none?
Can gold grow worthless, that has stood the touch?
No; gold they seem'd, but they were never such.
Horatio's servant once, with bow and cringe,
Swinging the parlour-door upon its hinge,
Dreading a negative, and overawed
Lest he should trespass, begg'd to go abroad.
Go, fellow!—whither?—turning short about—
Nay. Stay at home—you 're always going out.
'Tis but a step, sir, just at the street's end.—
For what?—An please you, sir, to see a friend.—

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A friend! Horatio cried, and seem'd to start—
Yea, marry, shalt thou, and with all my heart.—
And fetch my cloak; for, though the night be raw,
I'll see him too—the first I ever saw.
I knew the man, and knew his nature mild,
And was his plaything often when a child;
But somewhat at that moment pinch'd him close,
Else he was seldom bitter or morose.
Perhaps his confidence just then betray'd,
His grief might prompt him with the speech he made;
Perhaps 'twas mere good humour gave it birth,
The harmless play of pleasantry and mirth.
Howe'er it was, his language, in my mind,
Bespoke at least a man that knew mankind.
But not to moralize too much, and strain
To prove an evil, of which all complain,
(I hate long arguments verbosely spun,)
One story more, dear Hill, and I have done:
Once on a time an emperor, a wise man,
No matter where, in China or Japan,
Decreed, that whosoever should offend
Against the well-known duties of a friend,
Convicted once should ever after wear
But half a coat, and shew his bosom bare.
The punishment importing this, no doubt,
That all was naught within, and all found out.
O happy Britain! we have not to fear
Such hard and arbitrary measure here;
Else, could a law, like that which I relate,
Once have the sanction of our triple state,
Some few, that I have known in days of old,
Would run most dreadful risk of catching cold;
While you, my friend, whatever wind should blow,
Might traverse England safely to and fro,
An honest man, close button'd to the chin,
Broad cloth without, and a warm heart within.

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EPITAPH ON A HARE.

[First published in the Gentleman's Magazine for December, 1784. Cowper's love of animals, and the history of his "Hares" particularly, have been explained in the Life. The following extract shews that the poet's *menagerie* was occasionally pretty numerous: "Our friend," says Lady Hesketh, in a letter to her sister, "is very fond of animals, and had at one time five rabbits, three hares, eight pair of pigeons, two guinea pigs, a magpie, a jay, and a starling; besides two goldfinches, two canary birds, two dogs, and a squirrel, which used to play with one of the hares continually."]

HERE lies, whom hound did ne'er pursue,
  Nor swifter greyhound follow,
Whose foot ne'er tainted morning dew,
  Nor heard the huntsman's hallo',

Old Tiney, surliest of his kind,
  Who, nursed with tender care,
And to domestic bounds confined,
  Was still a wild Jack-hare.

Though duly from my hand he took
  His pittance every night,
He did it with a jealous look,
  And, when he could, would bite.

His diet was of wheaten bread,
  And milk, and oats, and straw;
Thistles, or lettuces instead,
  With sand to scour his maw.

On twigs of hawthorn he regaled,
  On pippins' russet peel,
And when his juicy salads fail'd,
  Sliced carrot pleased him well.

A Turkey carpet was his lawn,
  Whereon he loved to bound,
To skip and gambol like a fawn,
  And swing his rump around.

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His frisking was at evening hours,
  For then he lost his fear,
But most before approaching showers,
  Or when a storm drew near.

Eight years and five round rolling moons
  He thus saw steal away,
Dozing out all his idle noons,
  And every night at play.

I kept him for his humour's sake,
  For he would oft beguile
My heart of thoughts that made it ache,
  And force me to a smile.

But now beneath his walnut shade
  He finds his long last home,
And waits, in snug concealment laid,
  Till gentler Puss shall come.

He, still more aged, feels the shocks
  From which no care can save,
And, partner once of Tiney's box,
  Must soon partake his grave.

EPITAPHIUM ALTERUM.

Hic etiam jacet,
Qui totum novennium vixit,
Puss.
Siste paulisper,
Qui præteriturus es,
Et tecum sic reputa—
Nunc neque canis venaticus,
Nec plumbum missile,
Nec laqueus,
Nec imbres nimii,
Confecêre
Tamen mortuus est—
Et moriar ego.

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THE POPLAR FIELD.

[The scene of this little poem, first published in the Gentleman's Magazine, January, 1785, is about two miles from Olney, on the banks of the Ouse, where the river expands into a wide and beautiful reach. Trees of considerable magnitude, scions from the primitive roots, now supply the place of "Cowper's trees." The expression, "twelve years," refers to his long indisposition; and we can readily conceive the feelings with which such a mind would revisit scenes so long lost, and so recovered.]

THE poplars are fell'd, farewell to the shade,
And the whispering sound of the cool colonnade;
The winds play no longer and sing in the leaves,
Nor Ouse on his bosom their image receives.

Twelve years have elapsed since I last took a view
Of my favourite field, and the bank where they grew;
And now in the grass behold they are laid,
And the tree is my seat, that once lent me a shade.

The blackbird has fled to another retreat,
Where the hazels afford him a screen from the heat,
And the scene, where his melody charm'd me before,
Resounds with his sweet-flowing ditty no more.

My fugitive years are all hasting away,
And I must ere long lie as lowly as they,
With a turf on my breast, and a stone at my head,
Ere another such grove shall arise in its stead.

'Tis a sight to engage me, if any thing can,
To muse on the perishing pleasures of man;
Though his life be a dream, his enjoyments, I see,
Have a being less durable even than he.*

* Cowper afterwards altered this last stanza in the following manner:—

The change both my heart and my fancy employs,
I reflect on the frailty of man and his joys;
Short-lived as we are, yet our pleasures, we see,
Have a still shorter date, and die sooner than we.

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THE NEEDLESS ALARM.

A TALE.

[The scenery here described lies about two miles distant in a north-west direction from Olney, and chiefly on the Throckmorton estates. The tale seems to have been founded on an event mentioned in one of the Poet's letters, in which he describes himself not only as a spectator of a fox chase, but as accidentally "in at the death."]

There is a field, through which I often pass,
Thick overspread with moss and silky grass,
Adjoining close to Kilwick's echoing wood,
Where oft the bitch-fox hides her hapless brood,
Reserved to solace many a neighbouring squire,
That he may follow them through brake and brier,
Contusion hazarding of neck or spine,
Which rural gentlemen call sport divine.
A narrow brook, by rushy banks conceal'd,
Runs in a bottom, and divides the field;
Oaks intersperse it, that had once a head,
But now wear crests of oven-wood instead;
And where the land slopes to its watery bourne,
Wide yawns a gulf beside a ragged thorn;
Bricks line the sides, but shiver'd long ago,
And horrid brambles intertwine below;
A hollow scoop'd, I judge in ancient time,
For baking earth, or burning rock to lime.
  Not yet the hawthorn bore her berries red,
With which the fieldfare, wintry guest, is fed;
Nor autumn yet had brush'd from every spray,
With her chill hand, the mellow leaves away;
But corn was housed, and beans were in the stack,
Now therefore issued forth the spotted pack,
With tails high mounted, ears hung low, and throats
With a whole gamut fill'd of heavenly notes,
For which, alas! my destiny severe,
Though ears she gave me two, gave me no ear.
  The sun, accomplishing his early march,
His lamp now planted on heaven's topmost arch,

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When, exercise and air my only aim,
And heedless whither, to that field I came,
Ere yet with ruthless joy the happy hound
Told hill and dale that Reynard's track was found,
Or with the high-raised horn's melodious clang
All Kilwick and all Dingle-derry rang.
  Sheep grazed the field; some with soft bosom press'd
The herb as soft, while nibbling stray'd the rest;
Nor noise was heard but of the hasty brook,
Struggling, detain'd in many a petty nook.
All seem'd so peaceful, that from them convey'd
To me, their peace by kind contagion spread.
  But when the huntsman, with distended cheek,
'Gan make his instrument of music speak,
And from within the wood that crash was heard,
Though not a hound from whom it burst appear'd,
The sheep recumbent, and the sheep that grazed,
All huddling into phalanx, stood and gazed,
Admiring, terrified, the novel strain,
Then coursed the field around, and coursed it round again;
But, recollecting with a sudden thought,
That flight in circles urged advanced them nought,
They gather'd close around the old pit's brink,
And thought again — but knew not what to think.
  The man to solitude accustom'd long,
Perceives in every thing that lives a tongue;
Not animals alone, but shrubs and trees,
Have speech for him, and understood with ease;
After long drought, when rains abundant fall,
He hears the herbs and flowers rejoicing all:
Knows what the freshness of their hue implies,
How glad they catch the largess of the skies;
But, with precision nicer still, the mind
He scans of every locomotive kind;
Birds of all feather, beasts of every name,
That serve mankind, or shun them, wild or tame;
The looks and gestures of their griefs and fears
Have all articulation in his ears;
He spells them true, by intuition's light;
And needs no glossary to set him right.

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This truth premised, was needful as a text,
To win due credence to what follows next.
Awhile they mused; surveying every face,
Thou hadst supposed them of superior race;
Their periwigs of wool, and fears combined,
Stamp'd on each countenance such marks of mind,
That sage they seem'd, as lawyers o'er a doubt,
Which, puzzling long, at last they puzzle out;
Or academic tutors, teaching youths,
Sure ne'er to want them, mathematic truths;
When thus a mutton, statelier than the rest,
A ram, the ewes and wethers sad address'd:—
"Friends! we have lived too long. I never heard
Sounds such as these, so worthy to be fear'd.
Could I believe that winds for ages pent
In earth's dark womb, have found at last a vent,
And from their prison-house below arise,
With all these hideous howlings to the skies,
I could be much composed, nor should appear
For such a cause to feel the slightest fear.
Yourselves have seen, what time the thunders roll'd
All night, we resting quiet in the fold.
Or heard we that tremendous bray alone,
I could expound the melancholy tone;
Should deem it by our old companion made,
The ass; for he, we know, has lately stray'd,
And being lost, perhaps, and wandering wide,
Might be supposed to clamour for a guide.
But ah! those dreadful yells, what soul can hear
That owns a carcase, and not quake for fear?
Demons produce them, doubtless, brazen-claw'd
And fang'd with brass, the demons are abroad;
I hold it, therefore, wisest and most fit,
That life to save, we leap into the pit."
Him answer'd then his loving mate and true,
But more discreet than he, a Cambrian ewe.
"How? leap into the pit our life to save?
To save our life leap all into the grave?
For can we find it less? Contemplate first
The depth how awful! falling there, we burst:

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Or should the brambles, interposed, our fall
In part abate, that happiness were small;
For with a race like theirs no chance I see
Of peace or ease to creatures clad as we.
Meantime, noise kills not. Be it Dapple's bray,
Or be it not, or be it whose it may,
And rush those other sounds, that seem by tongues
Of demons utter'd, from whatever lungs,
Sounds are but sounds, and till the cause appear
We have at least commodious standing here.
Come fiend, come fury, giant, monster, blast
From earth or hell, we can but plunge at last."
While thus she spake, I fainter heard the peals—
For Reynard, close attended at his heels
By panting dog, tired man, and spatter'd horse,
Through mere good fortune, took a different course.
The flock grew calm again, and I, the road
Following, that led me to my own abode,
Much wonder'd that the silly sheep had found
Such cause of terror in an empty sound,
So sweet to huntsman, gentleman, and hound.

MORAL.

Beware of desperate steps. The darkest day,
Live till to-morrow, will have pass'd away.

EPITAPH ON JOHNSON.

[Written 1785.]

[As this Epitaph first appears in one of Cowper's private letters, we find "favour" instead of "glory" in the last line.

Here Johnson lies—a sage by all allow'd,
Whom to have bred may well make England proud;
Whose prose was eloquence, by wisdom taught,
The graceful vehicle of virtuous thought;
Whose verse may claim—grave, masculine, and strong,
Superior praise to the mere poet's song;
Who many a noble gift from Heaven possess'd,
And faith at last, alone worth all the rest.
O man, immortal by a double prize,—
By fame on earth—by glory in the skies!

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THE JOURNEY.

[The date of this amusing jeu d' esprit belongs to the happy period of Cowper's intercourse with Lady Austen; and though admirably characteristic of his peculiar talent for humorous writing, has never before found a place in an edition of his collected works. The autograph was discovered by Hayley, rolled up with copies of the songs written at Lady Austen's request in 1783, as if the poet had resolved to lay aside, though not to destroy, all memorials of that connection. Through mistake of the last figure in the date, the composition appears among those of 1785.]

I sing of a journey to Clifton, *
We would have perform'd if we could;
Without cart or barrow to lift on
Poor Mary or me through the mud.
Sle, sla, slud,
Stuck in the mud,
Oh, it is pretty to wade through a flood.

So away we went slipping and sliding,
Hop, hop,—a la mode de deux frogs;
'Tis near as good walking as riding,
When ladies are dress'd in their clogs.
Wheels no doubt,
Go briskly about,
But they clatter, an rattle, and make such a rout.

DIALOGUE.

SHE.

"Well — now I protest it is charming,
How finely the weather improves;
That *cloud*, though, is rather alarming,
How slowly and stately it moves."

HE.

"Pshaw! never mind,
'Tis not in the wind,
We are travelling south, and shall leave it behind."

* The reader will recollect that Mrs Green, Lady Austen's sister, was married to the rector of Clifton.

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SHE.

"I am glad we are come for an airing,
For folks may be pounded and penn'd,
Until they grow rusty, not caring
To stir half a mile to an end."

HE.

"The longer we stay,
The longer we may;
It's a folly to think about weather or way."

SHE.

"But now I begin to be frighted;
If I fall, what a way I should roll!
I am glad that the bridge was indicted—
Stay! stop! I am sunk in a hole."

HE.

"Nay, never care,
'Tis a common affair;
You'll not be the last that will set a foot there."

SHE.

"Let me breathe now a little, and ponder
On what it were better to do;
That terrible lane I see yonder,
I think we shall never get through."

HE.

"So think I,—
But, by the bye,
We shall never know, if we never should try."

SHE.

"But should we get there, how shall we get home?
What a terrible deal of bad road we have pass'd,
Slipping and sliding; and if we should come
To a difficult state, I am ruin'd at last.
Oh, this lane!
Now it is plain,
That struggling and striving is labour in vain."

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HE.

"Stick fast there, while I go and look."

SHE.

"Don't go away for fear I should fall.

HE.

"I have examined it every nook,
And what you have here is a sample of all:
Come, wheel around;
The dirt we have found,
Would buy an estate at a farthing a pound."

Now, sister Ann, the guitar you must take,
Set it and sing it, and make it a song;
I have varied the verse for variety's sake,
And cut it off short because it was long.
'Tis hobbling and lame,
Which critics won't blame,
For the sense and the sound they say should be the same.

TO MISS C——, ON HER BIRTH-DAY.

[Presented to Miss Chester, the daughter of Mr Chester of Chichely, the brother-in-law of the Rev. Mr Bagot, so often mentioned in the Poet's letters. Written 1786.]

How many between east and west,
Disgrace their parent earth,
Whose deeds constrain us to detest
The day that gave them birth!
Not so when Stella's natal morn
Revolving months restore,
We can rejoice that she was born,
And wish her born once more!

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GRATITUDE.

ADDRESSED TO LADY HESKETH.

[1786.]

THIS cap,* that so stately appears,
  With ribbon-bound tassel on high,
Which seems by the crest that it rears
  Ambitious of brushing the sky:
This cap to my cousin I owe,
  She gave it, and gave me beside,
Wreathed into an elegant bow,
  The ribbon with which it is tied:

This wheel-footed studying chair,
  Contrived both for toil and repose,
Wide-elbow'd, and wadded with hair,
  In which I both scribble and dose,
Bright-studded to dazzle the eyes,
  And rival in lustre of that
In which, or astronomy lies,
  Fair Cassiopeïa sat:

These carpets, so soft to the foot,
  Caledonia's traffic and pride!
Oh, spare them, ye knights of the boot,
  Escaped from a cross-country ride!
This table and mirror within,
  Secure from collision and dust,
At which I oft shave cheek and chin,
  And periwig nicely adjust:

This moveable structure of shelves,
  For its beauty admired and its use,
And charged with octavos and twelves,
  The gayest I had to produce;
Where, flaming in scarlet and gold,
  My poems enchanted I view,

* It is with this cap that Cowper is represented in his usual portraits.

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And hope, in due time, to behold
  My Iliad and Odyssey too:

This china, that decks the alcove,
  Which here people call a buffet,
But what the gods call it above,
  Has ne'er been reveal'd to us as yet:
These curtains, that keep the room warm,
  Or cool, as the season demands,
Those stoves that for pattern and form,
  Seem the labour of Mulciber's hands,—

All these are not half that I owe
  To One, from our earliest youth
To me ever ready to show
  Benignity, friendship, and truth;
For time, the destroyer declared,
  And foe of our perishing kind,
If even her face he has spared,
  Much less could he alter her mind.

Thus compass'd about with the goods
  And chattels of leisure and ease,
I indulge my poetical moods
  In many such fancies as these;
And fancies I fear they will seem—
  Poets' goods are not often so fine;
The poets will swear that I dream,
  When I sing of the splendour of mine.

THE MORALIZER CORRECTED.

A TALE.

A HERMIT, or, if 'chance you hold
That title now too trite and old,
A man, once young, who lived retired
As hermit could have well desired,
His hours of study closed at last,
And finish'd his concise repast,

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Stoppled his cruse, replaced his book
Within its customary nook,
And, staff in hand, set forth to share
The sober cordial of sweet air,
Like Isaac, with a mind applied
To serious thought at evening-tide.
Autumnal rains had made it chill,
And from the trees, that fringed his hill,
Shades slanting at the close of day
Chill'd more his else delightful way.
Distant a little mile he spied
A western bank's still sunny side,
And right toward the favour'd place
Proceeding with his nimblest pace,
In hope to bask a little yet,
Just reach'd it when the sun was set.
  Your hermit, young and jovial sirs!
Learns something from whate'er occurs—
And hence, he said, my mind computes
The real worth of man's pursuits.
His object chosen, wealth or fame,
Or other sublunary game,
Imagination to his view
Presents it deck'd with every hue,
That can seduce him not to spare
His powers of best exertion there,
But youth, health, vigour to expend
On so desirable an end.
Ere long approach life's evening shades,
The glow that fancy gave it fades;
And, earn'd too late, it wants the grace
Which first engaged him in the chase.
  True, answer'd an angelic guide,
Attendant at the senior's side—
But whether all the time it cost
To urge the fruitless chase be lost,
Must be decided by the worth
Of that which call'd his ardour forth.
Trifles pursued, whate'er the event,
Must cause him shame or discontent;

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A vicious object still is worse,
Successful there he wins a curse;
But he, whom even in life's last stage
Endeavours laudable engage,
Is paid, at least, in peace of mind,
And sense of having well design'd;
And if, ere he attain his end,
His sun precipitate descend,
A brighter prize than that he meant
Shall recompense his mere intent.
No virtuous wish can bear a date
Either too early or too late.

STANZAS

SUBJOINED TO THE YEARLY BILL OF MORTALITY, OF THE PARISH OF ALL-SAINTS, NORTHAMPTON, A.D. 1787.

[The "Mortuary Verses," often so beautiful, always so impressive, were supplied at the request of Samuel Cox, parish clerk of Northampton. In that town, as in several others in England, it is customary to publish yearly about Christmas the annual deaths in the parish. To these lists of mortality Cowper's stanzas were appended; and it is not easy to conceive greater condescension than such a man thus supplying exquisite and valuable poetry in place of the wretched effusions which usually accompany these records of death. But the occasion offered an opportunity of perhaps advancing the interests of religion and morality, and that was reward and motive sufficient. See letter to Lady Hesketh, November 27, 1787, vol. II.]

Pallida Mors æquo pulsat pede pauperum tabernas,
Regumque turres. HORACE.

Pale death with equal foot strikes wide the door
Of royal halls and hovels of the poor.

WHILE thirteen moons saw smoothly run
The Nen's barge-laden wave,
All these, life's rambling journey done,
Have found their home, the grave.

Was man (frail always) made more frail
Than in foregoing years?
Did famine, or did plague prevail,
That so much death appears?

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No; these were vigorous as their sires,
  Nor plague nor famine came:
This annual tribute Death requires,
  And never waves his claim.

Like crowded forest-trees we stand,
  And some are mark'd to fall;
The axe will smite at God's command,
  And soon shall smite us all.

Green as the bay-tree, ever green,
  With its new foliage on,
The gay, the thoughtless, I have seen:
  I pass'd, and they were gone.

Read, ye that run, the solemn truth,
  With which I charge my page;
A worm is in the bud of youth,
  And at the root of age.

No present health can health ensure
  For yet an hour to come;
No medicine, though it often cure,
  Can always baulk the tomb.

And oh! that humble as my lot,
  And scorn'd as is my strain,
These truths, though known, too much forgot,
  I may not teach in vain.

So prays your clerk with all his heart,
  And, ere he quits the pen,
Begs *you* for once to take *his* part,
  And answer all — Amen!

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SONNET

ADDRESSED TO HENRY COWPER, ESQ.

ON HIS EMPHATICAL AND INTERESTING DELIVERY OF THE DEFENCE OF WARREN HASTINGS, ESQ. IN THE HOUSE OF LORDS.

[This gentleman was cousin to the poet, and they had been intimate in early life. The Sonnet was first printed anonymously in the Gentleman's Magazine, 1788; General Cowper copied and sent it to the author, as something with which he had been exceedingly pleased.]

COWPER, whose silver voice, task'd sometimes hard,
  Legends prolix delivers in the ears
  (Attentive when thou read'st) of England's peers,
Let verse at length yield thee thy just reward.

Thou wast not heard with drowsy disregard,
  Expending late on all that length of plea
  Thy generous powers; but silence honour'd thee,
Mute as e'er gazed on orator or bard.

Thou art not voice alone, but hast beside
  Both heart and head; and couldst with music sweet,
    Of Attic phrase and senatorial tone,
Like thy renown'd forefathers, far and wide
  Thy fame diffuse, praised not for utterance meet
    Of *others'* speech, but magic of *thy own.*

THE POET'S NEW-YEAR'S GIFT.

[This little piece, which, according to the decision of a living critic, "includes one of the most delicate complimentary turns that ever poet paid or woman received," was presented to Lady Throckmorton on the first day of the year 1788.]

MARIA! I have every good
  For thee wish'd many a time,
Both sad, and in a cheerful mood,
  But never yet in rhyme.

To wish thee fairer is no need,
  More prudent, or more sprightly,
Or more ingenious, or more freed
  From temper-flaws unsightly.

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What favour then not yet possess'd,
  Can I for thee require,
In wedded love already blest,
  To thy whole heart's desire?

None here is happy but in part:
  Full bliss is bliss divine;
There dwells some wish in every heart,
  And, doubtless, one in thine.

That wish, on some fair future day,
  Which Fate shall brightly gild,
('Tis blameless, be it what it may,)
  I wish it all fulfill'd.

ODE TO APOLLO.

ON AN INKGLASS ALMOST DRIED IN THE SUN.

["Insurpassably beautiful in conception," says Montgomery, "and in itself an answer to the prayer which it contains." Some of the allusions have perhaps a quaintness which takes from their ease.]

PATRON of all those luckless brains,
  That, to the wrong side leaning,
Indite much metre with much pains,
  And little or no meaning:

Ah why, since oceans, rivers, streams,
  That water all the nations,
Pay tribute to thy glorious beams,
  In constant exhalations,

Why, stooping from the noon of day,
  Too covetous of drink,
Apollo, hast thou stolen away
  A poet's drop of ink?

Upborne into the viewless air
  It floats a vapour now,
Impell'd through regions dense and rare,
  By all the winds that blow.

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Ordain'd, perhaps, ere summer flies,
  Combined with millions more,
To form an Iris in the skies,
  Though black and foul before.

Illustrious drop! and happy then
  Beyond the happiest lot
Of all that ever pass'd my pen,
  So soon to be forgot!

Phœbus, if such be thy design,
  To place it in thy bow,
Give wit, that what is left may shine
  With equal grace below.

PITY FOR POOR AFRICANS.

[This piece, and the two following on the same subject, were composed in 1788, with the intention of being printed and dispersed as ballads; they were not, however, published till they appeared in the first collected edition of the Author's poems.]

Video meliora proboque
Deteriora sequor.

I OWN I am shock'd at the purchase of slaves,
And fear those who buy them and sell them are knaves;
What I hear of their hardships, their tortures, and groans,
Is almost enough to draw pity from stones.

I pity them greatly, but I must be mum,
For how could we do without sugar and rum?
Especially sugar, so needful we see?
What! give up our desserts, our coffee, and tea!

Besides, if we do, the French, Dutch, and Danes,
Will heartily thank us, no doubt, for our pains;
If we do not buy the poor creatures, they will,
And tortures and groans will be multiplied still.

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If foreigners likewise would give up the trade,
Much more in behalf of your wish might be said;
But, while they get riches by purchasing blacks,
Pray tell me why we may not also go snacks?

Your scruples and arguments bring to my mind
A story so pat, you may think it is coin'd
On purpose to answer you out of my mint;
But I can assure you I saw it in print.

A youngster at school, more sedate than the rest,
Had once his integrity put to the test;
His comrades had plotted an orchard to rob,
And ask'd him to go and assist in the job.

He was shock'd, sir, like you, and answered "Oh no!
What! rob our good neighbour! I pray you don't go;
Besides the man's poor, his orchard's his bread,
Then think of his children, for they must be fed."

"You speak very fine, and you look very grave,
But apples we want, and apples we'll have;
If you will go with us, you shall have a share,
If not, you shall have neither apple nor pear."

They spoke, and Tom ponder'd—"I see they will go:
Poor man! what a pity to injure him so!
Poor man! I would save him his fruit if I could,
But staying behind will do him no good.

"If the matter depended alone upon me,
His apples might hang till they dropp'd from the tree;
But, since they will take them, I think I'll go too,
He will lose none by me, though I get a few."

His scruples thus silenced, Tom felt more at ease,
And went with his comrades the apples to seize;
He blamed and protested, but join'd in the plan:
He shared in the plunder, but pitied the man.

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THE NEGRO'S COMPLAINT.

Forced from my home and all its pleasures,
  Afric's coast I left forlorn;
To increase a stranger's treasures,
  O'er the raging billows borne.
Men from England bought and sold me,
  Paid my price in paltry gold;
But, though theirs they have enroll'd me,
  Minds are never to be sold.

Still in thought as free as ever,
  What are England's rights, I ask,
Me from my delights to sever,
  Me to torture, me to task?
Fleecy locks and black complexion
  Cannot forfeit Nature's claim;
Skins may differ, but affection
  Dwells in white and black the same.

Why did all-creating Nature
  Make the plant for which we toil?
Sighs must fan it, tears must water,
  Sweat of ours must dress the soil.
Think, ye masters iron-hearted,
  Lolling at your jovial boards;
Think how many backs have smarted
  For the sweets your cane affords.

Is there, as ye sometimes tell us,
  Is there One who reigns on high?
Has He bid you buy and sell us,
  Speaking from His throne, the sky?
Ask Him, if your knotted scourges,
  Matches, blood-extorting screws,
Are the means, which duty urges
  Agents of His will to use?

Hark! He answers — Wild tornados,
  Strewing yonder sea with wrecks;

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Wasting towns, plantations, meadows,
  Are the voice with which He speaks.
He, foreseeing what vexations
  Afric's sons should undergo,
Fix'd their tyrants' habitations
  Where his whirlwinds answer — No.

By our blood in Afric wasted,
  Ere our necks received the chain;
By the miseries we have tasted,
  Crossing in your barks the main;
By our sufferings, since ye brought us
  To the man-degrading mart;
All sustain'd by patience, taught us
  Only by a broken heart:

Deem our nation brutes no longer,
  Till some reason ye shall find
Worthier of regard, and stronger
  Than the colour of our kind.
Slaves of gold, whose sordid dealings
  Tarnish all your boasted powers,
Prove that you have human feelings,
  Ere you proudly question ours!

THE MORNING DREAM.

'Twas in the glad season of spring,
  Asleep at the dawn of the day,
I dream'd what I cannot but sing,
  So pleasant it seem'd as I lay.
I dream'd that on ocean afloat,
  Far hence to the westward I sail'd,
While the billows high-lifted the boat,
  And the fresh-blowing breeze never fail'd.

In the steerage a woman I saw,
  Such at least was the form that she wore,
Whose beauty impress'd me with awe,
  Ne'er taught me by woman before.

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She sat, and a shield at her side
  Shed light, like a sun on the waves,
And smiling divinely, she cried—
  "I go to make freemen of slaves."

Then raising her voice to a strain
  The sweetest that ear ever heard,
She sung of the slave's broken chain,
  Wherever her glory appear'd.
Some clouds, which had over us hung,
  Fled, chased by her melody clear,
And methought while she liberty sung,
  'Twas liberty only to hear.

Thus swiftly dividing the flood,
  To a slave-cultured island we came,
Where a demon, her enemy, stood—
  Oppression his terrible name.
In his hand, as the sign of his sway,
  A scourge hung with lashes he bore,
And stood looking out for his prey
  From Africa's sorrowful shore.

But soon as approaching the land
  That goddess-like woman he view'd,
The scourge he let fall from his hand,
  With blood of his subjects imbrued.
I saw him both sicken and die,
  And the moment the monster expired,
Heard shouts, that ascended the sky,
  From thousands with rapture inspired.

Awaking, how could I but muse
  At what such a dream should betide?
But soon my ear caught the glad news,
  Which served my weak thought for a guide—
That Britannia, renown'd o'er the waves
  For the hatred she ever has shown,
To the black-sceptre'd rulers of slaves,
  Resolves to have none of her own.

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LINES,

COMPOSED FOR A MEMORIAL OF

ASHLEY COWPER, ESQ.

IMMEDIATELY AFTER HIS DEATH, BY HIS NEPHEW WILLIAM, OF WESTON.

[Composed in June, 1788. Mr Cowper died aged eighty-seven.]

FAREWELL! endued with all that could engage
All hearts to love thee, both in youth and age!
In prime of life, for sprightliness enroll'd
Among the gay, yet virtuous as the old;

In life's last stage, (O blessings rarely found!)
Pleasant as youth with all its blossoms crown'd;
Through every period of this changeful state
Unchanged thyself — wise, good, affectionate!

Marble may flatter, and lest this should seem
O'ercharged with praises on so dear a theme,
Although thy worth be more than half supprest,
Love shall be satisfied, and veil the rest.

THE DOG AND THE WATER LILY.

NO FABLE.

[This exquisite moral application of an event so trivial in itself, was composed in July, 1788. Beau, a present to the Poet from the Misses Gunning, daughters of Sir Robert Gunning, celebrated for their beauty, and for having married two of the richest peers of England, was a constant attendant upon his master in all his rambles, and is even now remembered by some of the aged inhabitants of Olney. His skin stuffed is still, or was, at Eartham, in possession of Mr Hayley's heirs.]

THE noon was shady, and soft airs
Swept Ouse's silent tide,
When, 'scaped from literary cares,
I wander'd on his side.

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My spaniel, prettiest of his race,
And high in pedigree,
(Two nymphs adorn'd with every grace
That spaniel found for me,)

Now wanton'd lost in flags and reeds,
Now starting into sight,
Pursued the swallow o'er the meads
With scarce a slower flight.

It was the time when Ouse display'd
His lilies newly blown;
Their beauties I intent survey'd,
And one I wish'd my own.

With cane extended far I sought
To steer it close to land;
But still the prize, though nearly caught,
Escaped my eager hand.

Beau mark'd my unsuccessful pains
With fix'd considerate face,
And puzzling set his puppy brains
To comprehend the case.

But with a chirrup clear and strong,
Dispersing all his dream,
I thence withdrew, and follow'd long
The windings of the stream.

My ramble finish'd, I return'd,
Beau trotting far before,
The floating wreath again discern'd,
And plunging left the shore.

I saw him with that lily cropp'd
Impatient swim to meet
My quick approach, and soon he dropp'd
The treasure at my feet.

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Charm'd with the sight, the world, I cried,
  Shall hear of this thy deed:
My dog shall mortify the pride
  Of man's superior breed:

But chief myself I will enjoin,
  Awake at duty's call,
To shew a love as prompt as thine
  To Him who gives me all.

ON THE DEATH OF

LADY THROCKMORTON'S BULFINCH.

[Cowper relates this event in a letter to Rose.]

September 25, 1788.

Ye nymphs, if e'er your eyes were red
With tears o'er hapless favourites shed,
  O share Maria's grief!
Her favourite, even in his cage,
(What will not hunger's cruel rage?)
  Assassin'd by a thief.

Where Rhenus strays his vines among,
The egg was laid from which he sprung;
  And, though by nature mute,
Or only with a whistle blest,
Well-taught, he all the sounds express'd
  Of flageolet or flute.

The honours of his ebon poll
Were brighter than the sleekest mole;
  His bosom of the hue
With which Aurora decks the skies,
When piping winds shall soon arise,
  To sweep away the dew.

Above, below, in all the house,
Dire foe alike of bird and mouse,
  No cat had leave to dwell;

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And Bully's cage supported stood
On props of smoothest-shaven wood,
Large-built, and latticed well.

Well-latticed — but the grate, alas!
Not rough with wire of steel or brass,
For Bully's plumage sake,
But smooth with wands from Ouse's side,
With which, when neatly peel'd and dried,
The swains their baskets make.

Night veil'd the pole, all seem'd secure:
When led by instinct sharp and sure,
Subsistence to provide,
A beast forth sallied on the scout,
Long-back'd, long-tail'd, with whisker'd snout,
And badger-colour'd hide.

He entering at the study door,
Its ample area 'gan explore;
And something in the wind
Conjectured, sniffing round and round,
Better than all the books he found,
Food chiefly for the mind.

Just then, by adverse fate impress'd,
A dream disturb'd poor Bully's rest;
In sleep he seem'd to view
A rat fast clinging to the cage,
And, screaming at the sad presage,
Awoke and found it true.

For, aided both by ear and scent,
Right to his mark the monster went —
Ah, muse! forbear to speak
Minute the horrors that ensued;
His teeth were strong, the cage was wood —
He left poor Bully's beak.

O had he made that too his prey;
That beak, whence issued many a lay
Of such mellifluous tone,

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Might have repaid him well, I wot,
For silencing so sweet a throat,
Fast stuck within his own.

Maria weeps—the Muses mourn—
So when, by Bacchanalians torn,
On Thracian Hebrus' side
The tree-enchanter Orpheus fell,
His head alone remain'd to tell
The cruel death he died.

ON MRS MONTAGUE'S FEATHER HANGINGS.

[This is the lady at whose house the Blue Stocking Club used to meet, in Leicester Square. Her maiden name was Robison, she was born at York, 1720, educated under the care of Dr Conyers Middleton, and married into the Sandwich family. She died 1800, wrote Letters and Dialogues of the Dead, and proved a most kind patroness of literary merit; but she is now best known as having written the admirable defence of Shakespeare. She was a particular friend of Lady Hesketh, at whose suggestion the present verses appear to have been written.

The birds put off their every hue
To dress a room for Montague.
The Peacock sends his heavenly dyes,
His rainbows, and his starry eyes;
The Pheasant plumes, which round enfold
His mantling neck with downy gold;
The Cock, his arch'd tail's azure show;
And, river-blanch'd, the Swan his snow.
All tribes beside of Indian name,
That glossy shine, or vivid flame,
Where rises, and where sets the day,
Whate'er they boast of rich and gay,
Contribute to the gorgeous plan,
Proud to advance it all they can.
This plumage, neither dashing shower,
Nor blasts, that shake the dripping bower,
Shall drench again or discompose,
But screen'd from every storm that blows,
It boasts a splendour ever new,
Safe with protecting Montague.

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To the same patroness resort,
Secure of favour at her court,
Strong Genius, from whose forge of thought
Forms rise, to quick perfection wrought,
Which, though new-born, with vigour move,
Like Pallas springing arm'd from Jove —
Imagination scattering round
Wild roses over furrow'd ground,
Which Labour of his frown beguile,
And teach Philosophy a smile —
Wit flashing on Religion's side,
Whose fires, to sacred Truth applied,
The gem, though luminous before,
Obtrude on human notice more,
Like sunbeams on the golden height
Of some tall temple playing bright —
Well-tutor'd Learning, from his books
Dismiss'd with grave, not haughty, looks,
Their order on his shelves exact,
Not more harmonious or compact
Than that, to which he keeps confined
The various treasures of his mind —
All these to Montague's repair,
Ambitious of a shelter there.
There Genius, Learning, Fancy, Wit,
Their ruffled plumage calm refit,
(For stormy troubles loudest roar
Around their flight who highest soar)
And in her eye, and by her aid,
Shine safe without a fear to fade.
She thus maintains divided sway
With yon bright regent of the day;
The plume and poet both, we know,
Their lustre to his influence owe;
And she the works of Phœbus aiding,
Both poet saves and plume from fading.

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MORTUARY STANZAS

FOR THE YEAR 1788.

Quod adest, memento
Componere æquus. Cætera fluminis
Ritu feruntur. HOR.

Improve the present hour, for all beside
Is a mere feather on a torrent's tide.

COULD I, from Heaven inspired, as sure presage
To whom the rising year shall prove his last;
As I can number in my punctual page,
And item down the victims of the past;

How each would trembling wait the mournful sheet,
On which the press might stamp him next to die;
And, reading here his sentence, how replete
With anxious meaning, heaven-ward turn his eye!

Time then would seem more precious than the joys
In which he sports away the treasure now;
And prayer more seasonable than the noise
Of drunkards, or the music-drawing bow.

Then doubtless many a trifler, on the brink
Of this world's hazardous and headlong shore,
Forced to a pause, would feel it good to think,
Told that his setting sun must rise no more.

Ah, self-deceived! Could I prophetic say
Who next is fated, and who next, to fall,
The rest might then seem privileged to play;
But, naming *none*, the Voice now speaks to ALL.

Observe the dappled foresters, how light
They bound, and airy, o'er the sunny glade—
One falls—the rest, wide-scatter'd with affright,
Vanish at once into the darkest shade.

Had we their wisdom, should we, often warn'd,
Still need repeated warnings, and at last,

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A thousand awful admonitions scorn'd,
  Die self-accused of life run all to waste?

Sad waste! for which no after-thrift atones:
  The grave admits no cure for guilt or sin;
Dew-drops may deck the turf that hides the bones,
  But tears of godly grief ne'er flow within.

Learn then, ye living! by the mouth be taught
  Of all these sepulchres, instructors true,
That, soon or late, death also is your lot,
  And the next opening grave may yawn for you.

ON THE

QUEEN'S VISIT TO LONDON,

THE NIGHT OF THE 17TH MARCH, 1789.

[This piece, referring to the recovery of George III. was first published in *The World*.]

When, long sequester'd from his throne,
  George took his seat again,
By right of worth, not blood alone,
  Entitled here to reign,

Then loyalty, with all his lamps
  New trimm'd, a gallant show!
Chasing the darkness and the damps,
  Set London in a glow.

'Twas hard to tell, of streets or squares,
  Which form'd the chief display,
These most resembling cluster'd stars,
  Those the long milky way.

Bright shone the roofs, the domes, the spires,
  And rockets flew, self-driven,
To hang their momentary fires
  Amid the vault of heaven.

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So, fire with water to compare,
  The ocean serves, on high
Up-spouted by a whale in air,
  To express unwieldy joy.

Had all the pageants of the world
  In one procession join'd,
And all the banners been unfurl'd
  That heralds e'er design'd,

For no such sight had England's Queen
  Forsaken her retreat,
Where George recover'd made a scene,
  Sweet always, doubly sweet.

Yet glad she came that night to prove,
  A witness undescried,
How much the object of her love
  Was loved by all beside.

Darkness the skies had mantled o'er
  In aid of her design,—
Darkness, O Queen! ne'er call'd before
  To veil a deed of thine!

On borrow'd wheels away she flies,
  Resolved to be unknown,
And gratify no curious eyes
  That night, except her own.

Arrived, a night like noon she sees,
  And hears the million hum,
As all by instinct, like the bees,
  Had known their sovereign come.

Pleased she beheld aloft portray'd
  On many a splendid wall,
Emblems of health, and heavenly aid,
  And George the theme of all.

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Unlike the enigmatic line,
  So difficult to spell,
Which shook Belshazzar at his wine,
  The night his city fell.

Soon watery grew her eyes and dim,
  But with a joyful tear,
None else, except in prayer for him,
  George ever drew from her.

It was a scene in every part
  Like those in fable feign'd,
And seem'd by some magician's art
  Created and sustain'd.

But other magic there, she knew,
  Had been exerted none,
To raise such wonders in her view,
  Save love of George alone.

That cordial thought her spirits cheer'd,
  And through the cumbrous throng,
Not less unworthy to be fear'd,
  Convey'd her calm along.

So ancient poets say, serene
  The sea-maid rides the waves,
And, fearless of the billowy scene,
  Her peaceful bosom laves.

With more than astronomic eyes
  She view'd the sparkling show;
One Georgian star adorns the skies,
  She myriads found below.

Yet let the glories of a night
  Like that, once seen, suffice;
Heaven grant us no such future sight,
  Such previous woe the price!

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THE COCK-FIGHTER'S GARLAND.

[MAY, 1789.]

MUSE—Hide his name of whom I sing,
Lest his surviving house thou bring
For his sake into scorn,
Nor speak the school from which he drew
The much or little that he knew,
Nor place where he was born.

That such a man once was, may seem
Worthy of record (if the theme
Perchance may credit win)
For proof to man, what Man may prove,
If grace depart, and demons move
The source of guilt within.

This man (for since the howling wild
Disclaims him, Man he must be styled)
Wanted no good below,
Gentle he was, if gentle birth
Could make him such, and he had worth,
If wealth can worth bestow.

In social talk and ready jest
He shone superior at the feast,
And qualities of mind
Illustrious in the eyes of those
Whose gay society he chose
Possess'd of every kind.

Methinks I see him powder'd red,
With bushy locks his well-dress'd head
Wing'd broad on either side,
The mossy rose-bud not so sweet;
His steeds superb, his carriage neat
As luxury could provide.

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Can such be cruel? Such can be
Cruel as hell, and so was he;
A tyrant entertain'd
With barbarous sports, whose fell delight
Was to encourage mortal fight
'Twixt birds to battle train'd.

One feather'd champion he possess'd,
His darling far beyond the rest,
Which never knew disgrace,
Nor e'er had fought, but he made flow
The life-blood of his fiercest foe,
The Cæsar of his race.

It chanced, at last, when, on a day,
He push'd him to the desperate fray,
His courage droop'd, he fled.
The master storm'd, the prize was lost,
And instant, frantic at the cost,
He doom'd his favourite dead.

He seized him fast, and from the pit
Flew to the kitchen, snatch'd the spit,
And, "Bring me cord," he cried;
The cord was brought, and, at his word,
To that dire implement the bird,
Alive and struggling, tied.

The horrid sequel asks a veil,
And all the terrors of the tale
That can be, shall be, sunk—
Led by the sufferer's screams aright
His shock'd companions view the sight
And him with fury drunk.

All, suppliant, beg a milder fate
For the old warrior at the grate:
He, deaf to pity's call,
Whirl'd round him rapid as a wheel
His culinary club of steel,
Death menacing on all.

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But vengeance hung not far remote,
For while he stretch'd his clamorous throat
And heaven and earth defied,
Big with a curse too closely pent
That struggled vainly for a vent,
He totter'd, reel'd, and died.

'Tis not for us, with rash surmise,
To point the judgments of the skies,
But judgments plain as this,
That, sent for man's instruction, bring
A written label on their wing,
'Tis hard to read amiss.

ON THE

BENEFIT RECEIVED BY HIS MAJESTY FROM SEA-BATHING,

IN THE YEAR 1789.

O SOVEREIGN of an isle renown'd
For undisputed sway
Wherever o'er yon gulf profound
Her navies wing their way,

With juster claim she builds at length
Her empire on the sea,
And well may boast the waves her strength
Which strength restored to thee.

MORTUARY STANZAS FOR 1789.

—— Placidaque ibi demum morte quievit.—VIRG.

There calm at length he breathed his soul away.

" O MOST delightful hour by man
Experienced here below,
The hour that terminates his span,
His folly, and his woe!

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"Worlds should not bribe me back to tread
  Again life's dreary waste,
To see again my day o'erspread
  With all the gloomy past.

"My home henceforth is in the skies,
  Earth, seas, and sun, adieu!
All heaven unfolded to my eyes,
  I have no sight for you."

So spaké Aspasio, firm possess'd
  Of faith's supporting rod,
Then breathed his soul into its rest,
  The bosom of his God.

He was a man among the few
  Sincere on virtue's side;
And all his strength from Scripture drew,
  To hourly use applied.

That rule he prized, by that he fear'd,
  He hated, hoped, and loved;
Nor ever frown'd or sad appear'd,
  But when his heart had roved.

For he was frail, as thou or I,
  And evil felt within:
But when he felt it, heaved a sigh,
  And loathed the thought of sin.

Such lived Aspasio; and at last
  Call'd up from earth to heaven,
The gulf of death triumphant pass'd,
  By gales of blessing driven.

"*His* joys be *mine*," each reader cries,
  "When my last hour arrives:"
They shall be yours, my verse replies,
  Such only be your lives.

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ON THE RECEIPT OF

MY MOTHER'S PICTURE

OUT OF NORFOLK;

THE GIFT OF MY COUSIN, ANN BODHAM.

[The first notice of these verses occurs in a letter to Lady Hesketh, March 8, 1790. The portrait, of which an engraving accompanies this edition, is a miniature in oil by Heins, a German artist who practised in Norwich as a painter and engraver.]

Oh that those lips had language! Life has pass'd
With me but roughly since I heard thee last.
Those lips are thine—thy own sweet smiles I see,
The same, that oft in childhood solaced me;
Voice only fails, else how distinct they say,
"Grieve not, my child, chase all thy fears away!"
The meek intelligence of those dear eyes
(Blest be the art that can immortalize,
The art that baffles Time's tyrannic claim
To quench it) here shines on me still the same.
Faithful remembrancer of one so dear,
O welcome guest, though unexpected here!
Who bidd'st me honour with an artless song,
Affectionate, a mother lost so long.
I will obey, not willingly alone,
But gladly, as the precept were her own:
And, while that face renews my filial grief,
Fancy shall wave a charm for my relief,
Shall steep me in Elysian reverie,
A momentary dream, that thou art she.
My mother! when I learn'd that thou wast dead,
Say, wast thou conscious of the tears I shed?
Hover'd thy spirit o'er thy sorrowing son,
Wretch even then, life's journey just begun?
Perhaps thou gavest me, though unfelt, a kiss;
Perhaps a tear, if souls can weep in bliss—
Ah, that maternal smile! it answers—Yes.
I heard the bell toll'd on thy burial day,
I saw the hearse that bore thee slow away,
And, turning from my nursery window, drew
A long, long sigh, and wept a last adieu!

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But was it such?—It was. Where thou art gone,
Adieus and farewells are a sound unknown.
May I but meet thee on that peaceful shore,
The parting word shall pass my lips no more!
Thy maidens, grieved themselves at my concern,
Oft gave me promise of thy quick return.
What ardently I wish'd, I long believed,
And, disappointed still, was still deceived.
By expectation every day beguiled,
Dupe of *to-morrow* even from a child.
Thus many a sad to-morrow came and went,
Till, all my stock of infant sorrow spent,
I learn'd at last submission to my lot,
But though I less deplored thee, ne'er forgot.
Where once we dwelt our name is heard no more,
Children not thine have trod my nursery floor;
And where the gardener Robin, day by day,
Drew me to school along the public way,
Delighted with my bauble coach, and wrapt
In scarlet mantle warm, and velvet capt,
'Tis now become a history little known,
That once we call'd the pastoral house our own.
Short lived possession! but the record fair,
That memory keeps of all thy kindness there,
Still outlives many a storm, that has effaced
A thousand other themes less deeply traced.
Thy nightly visits to my chamber made,
That thou mightst know me safe and warmly laid;
Thy morning bounties ere I left my home,
The biscuit or confectionary plum;
The fragrant waters on my cheeks bestow'd
By thy own hand, till fresh they shone and glow'd:
All this, and more endearing still than all,
Thy constant flow of love that knew no fall,
Ne'er roughen'd by those cataracts and breaks,
That humour interposed too often makes;
All this still legible in memory's page,
And still to be so to my latest age,
Adds joy to duty, makes me glad to pay
Such honours to thee as my numbers may;

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Perhaps a frail memorial, but sincere,
Not scorn'd in heaven, though little noticed here.
Could time, his flight reversed, restore the hours,
When, playing with thy vesture's tissued flowers,
The violet, the pink, and jessamine,
I prick'd them into paper with a pin,
(And thou wast happier than myself the while,
Wouldst softly speak, and stroke my head and smile,)
Could those few pleasant hours again appear,
Might one wish bring them, would I wish them here?
I would not trust my heart—the dear delight
Seems so to be desired, perhaps I might.
But no—what here we call our life is such,
So little to be loved, and thou so much,
That I should ill requite thee to constrain
Thy unbound spirit into bonds again.
Thou, as a gallant bark from Albion's coast,
(The storms all weather'd and the ocean cross'd,)
Shoots into port at some well-haven'd isle,
Where spices breathe and brighter seasons smile,
There sits quiescent on the floods, that show
Her beauteous form reflected clear below,
While airs impregnated with incense play
Around her, fanning light her streamers gay;
So thou, with sails how swift! hast reach'd the shore,
"Where tempests never beat nor billows roar,"*
And thy loved consort on the dangerous tide
Of life, long since has anchor'd at thy side.
But me, scarce hoping to attain that rest,
Always from port withheld, always distress'd—
Me howling winds drive devious, tempest toss'd,
Sails ript, seams opening wide, and compass lost,
And day by day some current's thwarting force
Sets me more distant from a prosperous course.
But oh the thought that thou art safe, and he!
That thought is joy, arrive what may to me.
My boast is not that I deduce my birth
From loins enthroned, and rulers of the earth;
But higher far my proud pretensions rise—
The son of parents pass'd into the skies.

* Garth.

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And now farewell—time unrevoked has run
His wonted course, yet what I wish'd is done.
By contemplation's help, not sought in vain,
I seem to have lived my childhood o'er again;
To have renew'd the joys that once were mine,
Without the sin of violating thine;
And, while the wings of fancy still are free,
And I can view this mimic show of thee,
Time has but half succeeded in his theft—
Thyself removed, thy power to soothe me left.

TO

MRS THROCKMORTON,

ON HER BEAUTIFUL TRANSCRIPT OF HORACE'S ODE

AD LIBRUM SUUM.

[Two odes of Horace were discovered in one of the Roman libraries during the winter of 1788. Copies of them appear to have been sent to Weston House, which were transcribed by Lady Throckmorton into Cowper's Horace; upon the remaining blank leaf, in his own handwriting, with the date February 1790, are these verses, so happy in graceful compliment.]

MARIA, could Horace have guess'd
What honour awaited his ode
To his own little volume address'd,
The honour which you have bestow'd;
Who have traced it in characters here,
So elegant, even, and neat,
He had laugh'd at the critical sneer
Which he seems to have trembled to meet.

And sneer, if you please, he had said,
A nymph shall hereafter arise,
Who shall give me, when you are all dead,
The glory your malice denies;
Shall dignity give to my lay,
Although but a mere bagatelle;
And even a poet shall say,
Nothing ever was written so well.

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INSCRIPTION

FOR A STONE ERECTED AT THE SOWING OF A GROVE OF OAKS AT CHILLINGTON, THE SEAT OF T. GIFFARD, ESQ. 1790.

OTHER stones the era tell,
When some feeble mortal fell;
I stand here to date the birth
Of these hardy sons of earth.

Which shall longest brave the sky,
Storm and frost — these oaks or I?
Pass an age or two away,
I must moulder and decay,
But the years that crumble me
Shall invigorate the tree,
Spread its branch, dilate its size,
Lift its summit to the skies.

Cherish honour, virtue, truth,
So shalt thou prolong thy youth.
Wanting these, however fast
Man be fixt, and form'd to last,
He is lifeless even now,
Stone at heart, and cannot grow.

ANOTHER,

FOR A STONE ERECTED ON A SIMILAR OCCASION AT THE SAME PLACE IN THE FOLLOWING YEAR, 1790.

READER! behold a monument
That asks no sigh or tear,
Though it perpetuate the event
Of a great burial here.

Anno 1791.

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STANZAS

ON THE LATE INDECENT LIBERTIES TAKEN WITH THE REMAINS OF THE GREAT MILTON, — ANNO 1790.

"Me too, perchance, in future days,
The sculptured stone shall shew,
With Paphian myrtle or with bays
Parnassian on my brow.

"But I, or ere that season come,
Escaped from every care,
Shall reach my refuge in the tomb,
And sleep securely there." *

So sang, in Roman tone and style,
The youthful bard, ere long
Ordain'd to grace his native isle
With her sublimest song.

Who then but must conceive disdain,
Hearing the deed unblest
Of wretches who have dared profane
His dread sepulchral rest?

Ill fare the hands that heaved the stones
Where Milton's ashes lay,
That trembled not to grasp his bones
And steal his dust away!

O ill-requited bard! neglect
Thy living worth repaid,
And blind idolatrous respect
As much affronts thee dead.

* Forsitan et nostros ducat de marmore vultus
Nectens aut Paphia myrti aut Pernasside lauri
Fronde comas. — At ego secura pace quiescam.
MILTON *in Manso.*

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TO MRS KING,

ON HER KIND PRESENT TO THE AUTHOR, A PATCH-WORK COUNTERPANE OF HER OWN MAKING.

August 14, 1790.

[The lady here mentioned was the wife of the Rev. Dr King, rector of Kimbolten, a woman of great piety and goodness of heart, with whom Cowper long corresponded by letter, though they never met.]

THE Bard, if e'er he feel at all,
Must sure be quicken'd by a call
Both on his heart and head,
To pay with tuneful thanks the care
And kindness of a lady fair
Who deigns to deck his bed.

A bed like this, in ancient time,
On Ida's barren top sublime,
(As Homer's Epic shows,)
Composed of sweetest vernal flowers,
Without the aid of sun or showers,
For Jove and Juno rose.

Less beautiful, however gay,
Is that which in the scorching day
Receives the weary swain
Who, laying his long scythe aside,
Sleeps on some bank with daisies pied
Till roused to toil again.

What labours of the loom I see!
Looms numberless have groan'd for me!
Should every maiden come
To scramble for the patch that bears
The impress of the robe she wears,
The bell would toll for some.

And oh, what havock would ensue!
This bright display of every hue
All in a moment fled!

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As if a storm should strip the bowers
Of all their tendrils, leaves, and flowers—
Each pocketing a shred.

Thanks, then, to every gentle fair
Who will not come to peck me bare
As bird of borrow'd feather,
And thanks to one above them all,
The gentle fair of Pertenhall,
Who put the whole together.

IN MEMORY
OF THE LATE
JOHN THORNTON, ESQ.

[NOVEMBER, 1790.]

[The gentleman so often mentioned in the Letters as the undeclared benefactor to the poor of Olney.]

POETS attempt the noblest task they can,
Praising the Author of all good in man,
And next commemorating worthies lost,
The dead in whom that good abounded most.
Thee, therefore, of commercial fame, but more
Famed for thy probity from shore to shore,—
Thee, THORNTON! worthy in some page to shine,
As honest and more eloquent than mine,
I mourn; or, since thrice happy thou must be,
The world, no longer thy abode, not thee.
Thee to deplore were grief mispent indeed,—
It were to weep that goodness has its meed,
That there is bliss prepared in yonder sky,
And glory for the virtuous when they die.
What pleasure can the miser's fondled hoard,
Or spendthrift's prodigal excess afford,
Sweet as the privilege of healing wo
By virtue suffer'd combating below?
That privilege was thine; Heaven gave thee means
To illumine with delight the saddest scenes,
Till thy appearance chased the gloom, forlorn
As midnight, and despairing of a morn.

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Thou hadst an industry in doing good,
Restless as his who toils and sweats for food.
Avarice in thee was the desire of wealth
By rust imperishable or by stealth;
And if the genuine worth of gold depend
On application to its noblest end,
Thine had a value in the scales of Heaven,
Surpassing all that mine or mint had given.
And, though God made thee of a nature prone
To distribution boundless of thy own,
And still, by motives of religious force,
Impell'd thee more to that heroic course,
Yet was thy liberality discreet,
Nice in its choice, and of a temper'd heat;
And though in act unwearied, secret still,
As in some solitude the summer rill
Refreshes, where it winds, the faded green,
And cheers the drooping flowers, unheard, unseen.
  Such was thy charity,—no sudden start,
After long sleep, of passion in the heart,
But steadfast principle, and, in its kind,
Of close relation to the eternal mind,—
Traced easily to its true source above,
To Him whose works bespeak his nature, love.
  Thy bounties all were Christian, and I make
This record of thee for the gospel's sake,
That the incredulous themselves may see
Its use and power exemplified in thee.

MORTUARY STANZAS FOR 1790.

Ne commonentem recta sperne. BUCHANAN.
Despise not my good counsel.

He who sits from day to day,
  Where the prison'd lark is hung,
Heedless of his loudest lay,
  Hardly knows that he has sung.

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Where the watchman in his round
  Nightly lifts his voice on high,
None, accustom'd to the sound,
  Wakes the sooner for his cry.

So your verse-man I, and clerk,
  Yearly in my voice proclaim
Death at hand—yourselves his mark—
  And the foe's unerring aim.

Duly at my time I come,
  Publishing to all aloud,—
Soon the grave must be your home,
  And your only suit a shroud.

But the monitory strain,
  Oft repeated in your ears,
Seems to sound too much in vain,
  Wins no notice, wakes no fears.

Can a truth, by all confess'd,
  Of such magnitude and weight,
Grow, by being oft express'd,
  Trivial as a parrot's prate?

Pleasure's call attention wins,
  Hear it often as we may;
New as ever seem our sins,
  Though committed every day.

Death and judgment, heaven and hell—
  These alone, so often heard,
No more move us than the bell
  When some stranger is interr'd.

Oh, then, ere the turf or tomb
  Cover us from every eye,
Spirit of instruction, come,
  Make us learn that we must die.

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THE JUDGMENT OF THE POETS.

[MAY, 1791.]

Two nymphs, both nearly of an age,
  Of numerous charms possess'd,
A warm dispute once chanced to wage,
  Whose temper was the best.

The worth of each had been complete,
  Had both alike been mild;
But one, although her smile was sweet,
  Frown'd oftener than she smiled.

And in her humour, when she frown'd,
  Would raise her voice, and roar,
And shake with fury to the ground
  The garland that she wore.

The other was of gentler cast,
  From all such frenzy clear,
Her frowns were seldom known to last,
  And never proved severe.

To poets of renown in song
  The nymphs referr'd the cause,
Who, strange to tell, all judged it wrong,
  And gave misplaced applause.

They gentle call'd, and kind and soft,
  The flippant and the scold,
And though she changed her mood so oft,
  That failing left untold.

No judges, sure, were e'er so mad,
  Or so resolved to err—
In short, the charms her sister had
  They lavish'd all on her.

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Then thus the god whom fondly they
  Their great inspirer call,
Was heard, one genial summer's day,
  To reprimand them all.

"Since thus ye have combined," he said,
  "My favourite nymph to slight,
Adorning May, that peevish maid,
  With June's undoubted right,

"The minx shall, for your folly's sake,
  Still prove herself a shrew,
Shall make your scribbling fingers ache,
  And pinch your noses blue."

EPITAPH
ON
MRS M. HIGGINS, OF WESTON.

[1791.]

LAURELS may flourish round the conqueror's tomb,
But happiest they who win the world to come.
Believers have a silent field to fight,
And their exploits are veil'd from human sight:
They in some nook, where little known they dwell,
Kneel, pray in faith, and rout the hosts of hell;
Eternal triumphs crown their toils divine,
And all those triumphs, Mary, now are thine.

THE RETIRED CAT.

[This poem was written in the autumn of 1791; its subject is mentioned with praise by the poet, as a promising kitten, in 1787.]

A POET'S Cat, sedate and grave
As poet well could wish to have,
Was much addicted to inquire
For nooks to which she might retire,
And where, secure as mouse in chink,
She might repose, or sit and think.

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I know not where she caught the trick—
  Nature perhaps herself had cast her
In such a mould *philosophique*,
  Or else she learn'd it of her master.
Sometimes ascending, debonnair,
An apple-tree, or lofty pear,
Lodged with convenience in the fork,
She watch'd the gardener at his work;
Sometimes her ease and solace sought
In an old empty watering pot,
There wanting nothing, save a fan,
To seem some nymph in her sedan
Apparell'd in exactest sort,
And ready to be borne to court.

  But love of change it seems has place
Not only in our wiser race;
Cats also feel as well as we,
That passion's force, and so did she.
Her climbing, she began to find,
Exposed her too much to the wind,
And the old utensil of tin
Was cold and comfortless within;
She therefore wish'd, instead of those,
Some place of more serene repose,
Where neither cold might come, nor air
Too rudely wanton with her hair,
And sought it in the likeliest mode
Within her master's snug abode.

  A drawer, it chanced, at bottom lined
With linen of the softest kind,
With such as merchants introduce
From India, for the ladies' use,
A drawer impending o'er the rest,
Half open in the topmost chest,
Of depth enough, and none to spare,
Invited her to slumber there;
Puss, with delight beyond expression,
Survey'd the scene, and took possession.

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Recumbent at her ease ere long,
And lull'd by her own humdrum song,
  She left the cares of life behind,
And slept as she would sleep her last,
  When in came, housewifely inclined,
The chambermaid, and shut it fast,
By no malignity impell'd,
But all unconscious whom it held.

  Awaken'd by the shock, cried Puss,
"Was ever cat attended thus!
The open drawer was left, I see,
Merely to prove a nest for me,
For soon as I was well composed
Then came the maid, and it was closed.
How smooth these 'kerchiefs and how sweet!
Oh, what a delicate retreat!
I will resign myself to rest
Till Sol declining in the west
Shall call to supper, when, no doubt,
Susan will come and let me out."

  The evening came, the sun descended,
And puss remain'd still uattended.
The night roll'd tardily away,
(With her indeed 'twas never day)
The sprightly morn her course renew'd,
The evening gray again ensued,
And puss came into mind no more
Than if entomb'd the day before.
With hunger pinch'd, and pinch'd for room,
She now presaged approaching doom,
Nor slept a single wink, or purr'd,
Conscious of jeopardy incurr'd.

  That night, by chance, the poet watching,
Heard an inexplicable scratching;
His noble heart went pit-a-pat,
And to himself he said—"What 's that?"
He drew the curtain at his side,
And forth he peep'd, but nothing spied;

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Yet, by his ear directed, guess'd
Something imprison'd in the chest,
And, doubtful what, with prudent care
Resolved it should continue there.
At length, a voice which well he knew,
A long and melancholy mew,
Saluting his poetic ears,
Consoled him, and dispell'd his fears;
He left his bed, he trod the floor,
He 'gan in haste the drawers explore,
The lowest first, and without stop
The rest in order to the top.
For 'tis a truth well known to most,
That whatsoever thing is lost,
We seek it, ere it come to light,
In every cranny but the right.
Forth skipp'd the cat, not now replete
As erst with airy self-conceit,
Nor in her own fond apprehension
A theme for all the world's attention,
But modest, sober, cured of all
Her notions hyperbolical,
And wishing for a place of rest
Any thing rather than a chest.
Then stepp'd the poet into bed
With this reflection in his head:

MORAL.

Beware of too sublime a sense
Of your own worth and consequence.
The man who dreams himself so great,
And his importance of such weight,
That all around in all that 's done
Must move and act for him alone,
Will learn in school of tribulation
The folly of his expectation.

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YARDLEY OAK.

[This is one of the most finished specimens of Cowper's blank verse, the finest passages of the Task not excepted. The history of the poem, which must have been begun and brought to its present state between the autumn of 1788, and the close of 1791, is curious. Contrary to his usual practice, Cowper had mentioned this composition to none of his friends; he probably began with the resolution of continuing the piece, but seems to have thrown aside and forgotten the manuscript. Some time after the poet's decease, Hayley, on turning over a boxful of his manuscripts, transmitted to him by the Rev. Dr Johnson, discovered this original among the rejected alterations of translated poetry. The copy had been more carefully corrected than was usual with Cowper, and written on loose half quires of quarto paper, with blanks apparently to be filled up. We find allusions to this tree in letters to Rose; and in some loose memoranda in the poet's hand were the following:—"Yardley oak, in girth, feet 22, inches 6½. The oak at Yardley Lodge, feet 28, inches 5." These refer to two different trees, the first "the Yardley oak," about five miles from Cowper's residence; the other the "Judith oak," from the niece of the Conqueror, who married the English Earl of Northampton, Waltheof, and, according to tradition, planted the oak.]

Survivor sole, and hardly such, of all
That once lived here, thy brethren, at my birth,
(Since which I number threescore winters past,)
A shatter'd veteran, hollow-trunk'd perhaps,
As now, and with excoriate forks deform,
Relics of ages! Could a mind, imbued
With truth from Heaven, created thing adore,
I might with reverence kneel and worship thee.

It seems idolatry with some excuse,
When our forefather Druids in their oaks
Imagined sanctity. The conscience, yet
Unpurified by an authentic act
Of amnesty, the meed of blood divine,
Loved not the light, but, gloomy, into gloom
Of thickest shades, like Adam after taste
Of fruit proscribed, as to a refuge, fled.

Thou wast a bauble once; a cup and ball,
Which babes might play with; and the thievish jay,

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Seeking her food, with ease might have purloin'd
The auburn nut that held thee, swallowing down
Thy yet close-folded latitude of boughs
And all thine embryo vastness at a gulp.
But fate thy growth decreed; autumnal rains
Beneath thy parent tree mellow'd the soil
Design'd thy cradle; and a skipping deer,
With pointed hoof dibbling the glebe, prepared
The soft receptacle, in which, secure,
Thy rudiments should sleep the winter through.

So Fancy dreams. Disprove it, if ye can,
Ye reasoners broad awake, whose busy search
Of argument, employ'd too oft amiss,
Sifts half the pleasures of short life away!

Thou fell'st mature; and in the loamy clod
Swelling with vegetative force instinct
Did'st burst thine egg, as theirs the fabled Twins,
Now stars; two lobes, protruding, pair'd exact;
A leaf succeeded, and another leaf,
And, all the elements thy puny growth
Fostering propitious, thou becamest a twig.

Who lived, when thou wast such? Oh, couldst thou speak,
As in Dodona once thy kindred trees
Oracular, I would not curious ask
The future, best unknown, but at thy mouth
Inquisitive, the less ambiguous past.

By thee I might correct, erroneous oft,
The clock of history, facts and events
Timing more punctual, unrecorded facts
Recovering, and mistated setting right—
Desperate attempt, till trees shall speak again!

Time made thee what thou wast — king of the woods;
And Time hath made thee what thou art—a cave
For owls to roost in. Once thy spreading boughs
O'erhung the champaign; and the numerous flocks

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That grazed it, stood beneath that ample cope
Uncrowded, yet safe-shelter'd from the storm.
No flock frequents thee now. Thou hast outlived
Thy popularity, and art become
(Unless verse rescue thee awhile) a thing
Forgotten, as the foliage of thy youth.

While thus through all the stages thou hast push'd
Of treeship — first a seedling, hid in grass;
Then twig; then sapling; and, as century roll'd
Slow after century, a giant bulk
Of girth enormous, with moss-cushion'd root
Upheaved above the soil, and sides emboss'd
With prominent wens globose — till at the last
The rottenness, which time is charged to inflict
On other mighty ones, found also thee.

What exhibitions various hath the world
Witness'd of mutability in all
That we account most durable below!
Change is the diet on which all subsist,
Created changeable, and change at last
Destroys them. Skies uncertain now the heat
Transmitting cloudless, and the solar beam
Now quenching in a boundless sea of clouds —
Calm and alternate storm, moisture and drought,
Invigorate by turns the springs of life
In all that live, plant, animal, and man,
And in conclusion mar them. Nature's threads,
Fine passing thought, even in her coarsest works,
Delight in agitation, yet sustain
The force that agitates, not unimpair'd;
But, worn by frequent impulse, to the cause
Of their best tone their dissolution owe.

Thought cannot spend itself, comparing still
The great and little of thy lot, thy growth
From almost nullity into a state
Of matchless grandeur, and declension thence,
Slow, into such magnificent decay.
Time was, when, settling on thy leaf, a fly

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Could shake thee to the root — and time has been
When tempests could not. At thy firmest age,
Thou hadst within thy bole solid contents,
That might have ribb'd the sides and plank'd the deck
Of some flagg'd admiral; and tortuous arms,
The shipwright's darling treasure, didst present
To the four-quarter'd winds, robust and bold,
Warp'd into tough knee-timber, many a load! *
But the axe spared thee. In those thriftier days
Oaks fell not, hewn by thousands, to supply
The bottomless demands of contest, waged
For senatorial honours. Thus to Time
The task was left to whittle thee away
With his sly scythe, whose ever-nibbling edge,
Noiseless, an atom, and an atom more,
Disjoining from the rest, has unobserved
Achieved a labour, which had far and wide,
By man perform'd, made all the forest ring.

Embowell'd now, and of thy ancient self
Possessing nought but the scoop'd rind, that seems
An huge throat, calling to the clouds for drink,
Which it would give in rivulets to thy root,
Thou temptest none, but rather much forbidd'st
The feller's toil, which thou couldst ill requite.
Yet is thy root sincere, sound as the rock,
A quarry of stout spurs, and knotted fangs,
Which, crook'd into a thousand whimsies, clasp
The stubborn soil, and hold thee still erect.

So stands a kingdom, whose foundation yet
Fails not, in virtue and in wisdom laid,
Though all the superstructure, by the tooth
Pulverized of venality, a shell
Stands now, and semblance only of itself!

Thine arms have left thee. Winds have rent them off
Long since, and rovers of the forest wild

* Knee-timber is found in the crooked arms of oak, which, by reason of their distortion, are easily adjusted to the angle formed where the deck and the ship's sides meet.

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With bow and shaft, have burnt them. Some have left
A splinter'd stump, bleach'd to a snowy white;
And some, memorial none, where once they grew.
Yet life still lingers in thee, and puts forth
Proof not contemptible of what she can,
Even where death predominates. The spring
Finds thee not less alive to her sweet force,
Than yonder upstarts of the neighbouring wood,
So much thy juniors, who their birth received
Half a millennium since the date of thine.

But since, although well qualified by age
To teach, no spirit dwells in thee, nor voice
May be expected from thee, seated here
On thy distorted root, with hearers none,
Or prompter, save the scene, I will perform
Myself the oracle, and will discourse
In my own ear such matter as I may.

One man alone, the father of us all,
Drew not his life from woman; never gazed,
With mute unconsciousness of what he saw,
On all around him; learn'd not by degrees,
Nor owed articulation to his ear;
But, moulded by his Maker into man
At once, upstood intelligent, survey'd
All creatures, with precision understood
Their purport, uses, properties, assign'd
To each his name significant, and, fill'd
With love and wisdom, render'd back to Heaven
In praise harmonious the first air he drew.
He was excused the penalties of dull
Minority. No tutor charged his hand
With the thought-tracing quill, or task'd his mind
With problems. History, not wanted yet,
Lean'd on her elbow, watching Time, whose course,
Eventful, should supply her with a theme.

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TO THE NIGHTINGALE,

WHICH THE AUTHOR HEARD SING ON NEW YEAR'S DAY, 1792.

[The poet mentions the fact in a letter to Mr Rose.]

WHENCE is it that, amazed, I hear
From yonder wither'd spray,
This foremost morn of all the year,
The melody of May?

And why, since thousands would be proud
Of such a favour shewn,
Am I selected from the crowd,
To witness it alone?

Sing'st thou, sweet Philomel, to me,
For that I also long
Have practised in the groves like thee,
Though not like thee in song?

Or sing'st thou rather under force
Of some divine command,
Commission'd to presage a course
Of happier days at hand?

Thrice welcome then! for many a long
And joyless year have I,
As thou to-day, put forth my song
Beneath a wintry sky.

But thee no wintry skies can harm,
Who only need'st to sing,
To make even January charm,
And every season Spring.

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LINES

WRITTEN FOR INSERTION IN A COLLECTION OF HAND-WRITINGS AND SIGNATURES MADE BY MISS PATTY, SISTER OF HANNAH MORE.

[Newton had been requested to negotiate this little matter with Cowper: and though the latter remarks on the verses — "trifling enough I readily confess they are; but I have always allowed myself to trifle occasionally; and on this occasion had not, nor have at present, time to do more;" yet we perceive, from the fact of the verses having been three times altered, and the copies of the alterations sent by post, that, in poetry at least, his trifling was not without solicitude. As an example of Cowper's emendations, the second copy may be acceptable: the final improvement was Lady Hesketh's suggestion.

In vain to live from age to age
We modern bards endeavour;
But write in Patty's book one page,
You gain your point for ever.

March 6, 1792.

In vain to live from age to age
While modern bards endeavour,
I write my name in Patty's page,
And gain my point for ever.

W. Cowper.

EPITAPH

ON A FREE BUT TAME REDBREAST.

March, 1792.

[The bird was a favourite of Miss Sally Hurdis, the sister of the Rev. Mr Hurdis, the poet's correspondent, and author of the Village Curate.]

These are not dew-drops, these are tears,
And tears by Sally shed
For absent Robin, who she fears,
With too much cause, is dead.

One morn he came not to her hand
As he was wont to come,
And, on her finger perch'd, to stand
Picking his breakfast-crumb.

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Alarm'd, she call'd him, and perplext,
  She sought him, but in vain;
That day he came not, nor the next,
  Nor ever came again.

She therefore raised him here a tomb,
  Though where he fell, or how,
None knows, so secret was his doom,
  Nor where he moulders now.

Had half a score of coxcombs died
  In social Robin's stead,
Poor Sally's tears had soon been dried,
  Or haply never shed.

But Bob was neither rudely bold
  Nor spiritlessly tame,
Nor was, like theirs, his bosom cold,
  But always in a flame.

TO DR AUSTIN,

OF CECIL STREET, LONDON.

[This gentleman had been sent for from London, by Mr Hayley, to attend Mrs Unwin, in an attack of paralysis. May 26, 1792.]

AUSTIN! accept a grateful verse from me,
The poet's treasure, no inglorious fee.
Loved by the Muses, thy ingenuous mind
Pleasing requital in my verse may find:
Verse oft has dash'd the scythe of Time aside,
Immortalizing names which else had died.
And, oh! could I command the glittering wealth
With which sick kings are glad to purchase health—
Yet, if extensive fame, and sure to live,
Were in the power of verse like mine to give,
I would not recompense his art with less,
Who, giving Mary health, heals my distress.

Friend of my friend! I love thee, though unknown,
And boldly call thee, being his, my own.

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SONNET

TO WILLIAM WILBERFORCE, ESQ.

[A correspondent in the Northampton Mercury had expressed some doubts regarding Cowper's real sentiments on the Slave Trade, because he had declined to write on the subject. In order to answer, without seeming to reply to, these remarks, this Sonnet and the following Epigram appeared in that paper, April 16, 1792. From his correspondence, also, Cowper's detestation of the principle of slavery sufficiently appears, though, with equal feeling and good taste, he regarded the vulgar atrocities, and the popular excitement connected with the traffic, as unpromising subjects for a sustained and dignified poem.]

THY country, Wilberforce, with just disdain,
  Hears thee, by cruel men and impious, call'd
  Fanatic, for thy zeal to loose the enthrall'd
From exile, public sale, and slavery's chain.
  Friend of the poor, the wrong'd, the fetter-gall'd,
Fear not lest labour such as thine be vain.
  Thou hast achieved a part; hast gain'd the ear
Of Britain's senate to thy glorious cause;
Hope smiles, joy springs, and though cold caution pause
  And weave delay, the better hour is near
  That shall remunerate thy toils severe
By peace for Afric, fenced with British laws.
Enjoy what thou hast won, esteem and love
From all the just on earth, and all the blest above.

EPIGRAM.

To purify their wine, some people bleed
A lamb into the barrel, and succeed;
No nostrum, planters say, is half so good
To make fine sugar, as a negro's blood.
Now lambs and negroes both are harmless things,
And thence, perhaps, this wondrous virtue springs.
'Tis in the blood of innocence alone—
Good cause why planters never try their own.

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SONNET

ADDRESSED TO WILLIAM HAYLEY, ESQ.

[JUNE 2, 1792.]

[Hayley first addressed Cowper in a letter enclosing a sonnet; the poetical compliment is here answered.]

HAYLEY—thy tenderness fraternal shown,
In our first interview, delightful guest!
To Mary and me for her dear sake distress'd,
Such as it is has made my heart thy own,
Though heedless now of new engagements grown;
For threescore winters make a wintry breast,
And I had purposed ne'er to go in quest
Of Friendship more, except with God alone.
But thou hast won me; nor is God my foe,
Who, ere this last afflictive scene began,
Sent thee to mitigate the dreadful blow,
My brother, by whose sympathy I know
Thy true deserts infallibly to scan,
Not more to admire the bard than love the man.

CATHARINA:

THE SECOND PART.

ON HER MARRIAGE TO GEORGE COURTENAY, ESQ.

June, 1792.

BELIEVE it or not, as you choose,
The doctrine is certainly true,
That the future is known to the muse,
And poets are oracles too.
I did but express a desire
To see Catharina at home,
At the side of my friend George's fire,
And, lo!—she is actually come.

Such prophecy some may despise,
But the wish of a poet and friend
Perhaps is approved in the skies,
And therefore attains to its end.

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'Twas a wish that flew ardently forth
From a bosom effectually warm'd
With the talents, the graces, and worth
Of the person for whom it was form'd.

Maria* would leave us, I knew,
To the grief and regret of us all,
But less to our grief could we view
Catharina the Queen of the Hall.
And therefore I wish'd as I did,
And therefore this union of hands;
Not a whisper was heard to forbid,
But all cry—Amen—to the bans.

Since therefore I seem to incur
No danger of wishing in vain,
When making good wishes for her,
I will e'en to my wishes again:—
With one I have made her a wife,
And now I will try with another,
Which I cannot suppress for my life—
How soon I can make her a mother.

LINES

ADDRESSED TO DR DARWIN,

AUTHOR OF THE "BOTANIC GARDEN."

[These lines were written at Eartham, August, 1792, in order to accompany some of Hayley's verses, with whom Darwin was a great favourite, from his care and tenderness as the medical attendant of the first Mrs Hayley.]

Two poets, (poets by report
Not oft so well agree,)
Sweet Harmonist of Flora's court!
Conspire to honour thee.

They best can judge a poet's worth,
Who oft themselves have known
The pangs of a poetic birth
By labours of their own.

* Lady Throckmorton.

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We therefore pleased extol thy song,
  Though various, yet complete,
Rich in embellishment as strong,
  And learned as 'tis sweet.

No envy mingles with our praise,
  Though, could our hearts repine
At any poet's happier lays,
  They would—they must, at thine.

But we, in mutual bondage knit
  Of Friendship's closest tie,
Can gaze on even Darwin's wit
  With an unjaundiced eye;

And deem the bard, whoe'er he be,
  And howsoever known,
Who would not twine a wreath for thee,
  Unworthy of his own.

AN EPITAPH.

(1792.)

Here lies one who never drew
Blood himself, yet many slew;
Gave the gun its aim, and figure
Made in field, yet ne'er pull'd trigger;
Armed men have gladly made
Him their guide, and him obey'd;
At his signified desire
Would advance, present, and fire.
Stout he was, and large of limb—
Scores have fled at sight of him;
And to all this fame he rose
Only following his nose.
Neptune was he call'd—not he
Who controls the boisterous sea,
But of happier command,
Neptune of the furrow'd land;
And, your wonder vain to shorten,
Pointer to Sir John Throckmorton.

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EPITAPH ON FOP,

A DOG BELONGING TO LADY THROCKMORTON.

August, 1792.

[These lines were written during Cowper's visit at Eartham. This and the preceding, each inscribed upon a pedestal supporting an urn, still ornament the grounds of Weston.]

THOUGH once a puppy, and though Fop by name,
Here moulders one whose bones some honour claim.
No sycophant, although of spaniel race,
And though no hound, a martyr to the chase—
Ye squirrels, rabbits, leverets, rejoice,
Your haunts no longer echo to his voice;
This record of his fate exulting view—
He died worn out with vain pursuit of you.

"Yes"—the indignant shade of Fop replies—
"And worn with vain pursuit man also dies."

MORTUARY STANZAS

FOR 1792.

Felix, qui potuit rerum cognoscere causas,
Atque metus omnes et inexorabile fatum
Subjecit pedibus, strepitumque Acherontis avari! VIRG.

Happy the mortal, who has traced effects
To their first cause, cast fear beneath his feet,
And Death, and roaring Hell's voracious fires.

THANKLESS for favours from on high,
Man thinks he fades too soon;
Though 'tis his privilege to die,
Would he improve the boon.

But he, not wise enough to scan
His best concerns aright,
Would gladly stretch life's little span
To ages, if he might.

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To ages in a world of pain,
  To ages, where he goes
Gall'd by affliction's heavy chain,
  And hopeless of repose.

Strange fondness of the human heart,
  Enamour'd of its harm!
Strange world, that costs it so much smart,
  And still has power to charm.

Whence has the world her magic power?
  Why deem we death a foe?
Recoil from weary life's best hour,
  And covet longer wo?

The cause is Conscience—Conscience oft
  Her tale of guilt renews:
Her voice is terrible, though soft,
  And dread of death ensues.

Then, anxious to be longer spared,
  Man mourns his fleeting breath:
All evils then seem light, compared
  With the approach of Death.

'Tis judgment shakes him; there 's the fear,
  That prompts the wish to stay:
He has incurr'd a long arrear,
  And must despair to pay.

Pay!—follow Christ, and all is paid;
  His death your peace ensures;
Think on the grave where He was laid,
  And calm descend to yours.

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SONNET

TO GEORGE ROMNEY, ESQ.

ON HIS PICTURE OF ME IN CRAYONS, DRAWN AT EARTHAM IN THE 61ST YEAR OF MY AGE, AND IN THE MONTHS OF AUGUST AND SEPTEMBER, 1792.

October, 1792.

[The sonnet was begun at Eartham, but such was Cowper's state of depression, that its completion occupied nearly three months.]

ROMNEY, expert infallibly to trace
On chart or canvass, not the form alone
And semblance, but, however faintly shewn,
The mind's impression too on every face,
With strokes that time ought never to erase —
Thou hast so pencill'd mine, that, though I own
The subject worthless, I have never known
The artist shining with superior grace.
But this I mark—that symptoms none of wo
In thy incomparable work appear.
Well—I am satisfied it should be so,
Since, on maturer thought, the cause is clear;
For in my looks what sorrow couldst thou see
When I was Hayley's guest, and sat to thee?

ON RECEIVING HAYLEY'S PICTURE.

[JANUARY, 1793.]

IN language warm as could be breathed or penn'd
Thy picture speaks the original, my friend;
Not by those looks that indicate thy mind,
They only speak thee friend of all mankind;
Expression here more soothing still I see,
That friend of *all* a partial friend to *me*.

EPITAPH

ON MR CHESTER, OF CHICHELEY.

[APRIL, 1793.]

TEARS flow, and cease not, where the good man lies,
Till all who know him follow to the skies.
Tears therefore fall where Chester's ashes sleep;
Him wife, friends, brothers, children, servants, weep—
And justly—few shall ever him transcend
As husband, parent, brother, master, friend.

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ON A PLANT OF VIRGIN'S BOWER,

DESIGNED TO COVER A GARDEN-SEAT.

[SPRING OF 1793.]

THRIVE, gentle plant! and weave a bower
For Mary and for me,
And deck with many a splendid flower
Thy foliage large and free.

Thou camest from Eartham, and wilt shade
(If truly I divine)
Some future day the illustrious head
Of him who made thee mine.

Should Daphne shew a jealous frown,
And Envy seize the bay,
Affirming none so fit to crown
Such honour'd brows as they,

Thy cause with zeal we shall defend,
And with convincing power;
For why should not the Virgin's Friend
Be crown'd with Virgin's bower?

TO MY COUSIN, ANNE BODHAM,

ON RECEIVING FROM HER A NETWORK PURSE, MADE BY HERSELF.

[MAY 4, 1793.]

[The lady from whom he received his mother's picture.]

MY gentle Anne, whom heretofore,
When I was young, and thou no more
Than plaything for a nurse,
I danced and fondled on my knee,
A kitten both in size and glee,—
I thank thee for my purse.

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Gold pays the worth of all things here;
But not of love—that gem 's too dear
For richest rogues to win it:
I, therefore, as a proof of love,
Esteem thy present far above
The best things kept within it.

INSCRIPTION

FOR AN HERMITAGE IN THE AUTHOR'S GARDEN.

[MAY, 1793.]

THIS cabin, Mary, in my sight appears,
Built as it has been in our waning years,
A rest afforded to our weary feet,
Preliminary to—the last retreat.

TO

MRS UNWIN.

[MAY, 1793.]

MARY! I want a lyre with other strings,
Such aid from Heaven as some have feign'd they drew,
An eloquence scarce given to mortals, new
And undebased by praise of meaner things,
That ere through age or wo I shed my wings,
I may record thy worth with honour due,
In verse as musical as thou art true,
And that immortalizes whom it sings.
But thou hast little need. There is a book
By seraphs writ with beams of heavenly light,
On which the eyes of God not rarely look,
A chronicle of actions just and bright;
There all thy deeds, my faithful Mary, shine,
And, since thou own'st that praise, I spare thee mine.

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TO

JOHN JOHNSON,

ON HIS PRESENTING ME WITH AN ANTIQUE BUST OF HOMER.

[MAY, 1793.]

KINSMAN beloved, and as a son, by me!
When I behold this fruit of thy regard,
The sculptured form of my old favourite bard,
I reverence feel for him, and love for thee.
Joy, too, and grief. Much joy that there should be
Wise men and learn'd, who grudge not to reward
With some applause my bold attempt and hard,
Which others scorn: critics by courtesy.
The grief is this—that, sunk in Homer's mine,
I lose my precious years, now soon to fail,
Handling his gold, which, howsoe'er it shine,
Proves dross when balanced in the Christian scale.
Be wiser thou—like our forefather Donne,
Seek heavenly wealth, and work for God alone.

TO

A YOUNG FRIEND,

ON HIS ARRIVING AT CAMBRIDGE WET, WHEN NO RAIN HAD FALLEN THERE.

[MAY, 1793.]

[This was addressed to Mr Johnson, the poet's kinsman, afterwards the Rev. Dr Johnson.]

IF Gideon's fleece, which drench'd with dew he found,
While moisture none refresh'd the herbs around,
Might fitly represent the Church, endow'd
With heavenly gifts, to heathens not allow'd;
In pledge, perhaps, of favours from on high,
Thy locks were wet when others' locks were dry.
Heaven grant us half the omen—may we see
Not drought on others, but much dew on thee!

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A TALE.

[JUNE, 1793.]

[Founded on a fact reported in the Scottish newspapers, and copied into the Buckinghamshire Herald for June 1, 1793, where Cowper read it as follows:—"Glasgow, May 3.—In a block or pulley, near the head of the mast of a gabart, now lying at the Broomielaw, there is a chaffinch's nest and four eggs. The nest was built while the vessel lay at Greenock, and was followed hither by both birds. Though the block is occasionally lowered for the inspection of the curious, the birds have not forsaken the nest. The cock, however, visits the nest but seldom, while the hen never leaves it but when she descends to the hull for food."]

IN Scotland's realm, where trees are few,
  Nor even shrubs abound;
But where, however bleak the view,
  Some better things are found:

For husband there and wife may boast
  Their union undefiled,
And false ones are as rare almost
  As hedge-rows in the wild,—

In Scotland's realm, forlorn and bare,
  The history chanced of late—
This history of a wedded pair,
  A chaffinch and his mate.

The spring drew near, each felt a breast
  With genial instinct fill'd;
They pair'd, and would have built a nest,
  But found not where to build.

The heaths uncover'd, and the moors,
  Except with snow and sleet,
Sea-beaten rocks and naked shores,
  Could yield them no retreat.

Long time a breeding-place they sought,
  Till both grew vex'd and tired;
At length a ship arriving, brought
  The good so long desired.

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A ship!—could such a restless thing
  Afford a place of rest?
Or was the merchant charged to bring
  The homeless birds a nest?

Hush—silent hearers profit most—
  This racer of the sea
Proved kinder to them than the coast,
  It served them with a tree.

But such a tree! 'twas shaven deal,
  The tree they call a mast,
And had a hollow with a wheel,
  Through which the tackle pass'd.

Within that cavity aloft
  Their roofless home they fix'd,
Form'd with materials neat and soft,
  Bents, wool, and feathers mix'd.

Four ivory eggs soon pave its floor,
  With russet specks bedight—
The vessel weighs, forsakes the shore,
  And lessens to the sight.

The mother-bird is gone to sea,
  As she had changed her kind;
But goes the male? Far wiser he
  Is doubtless left behind?

No—soon as from ashore he saw
  The winged mansion move,
He flew to reach it, by a law
  Of never-failing love.

Then perching at his consort's side,
  Was briskly borne along,
The billows and the blast defied,
  And cheer'd her with a song.

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The seaman with sincere delight
  His feather'd shipmates eyes
Scarce less exulting in the sight
  Than when he tows a prize.

For seamen much believe in signs,
  And from a chance so new,
Each some approaching good divines,
  And may his hopes be true!

Hail, honour'd land! a desert where
  Not even birds can hide,
Yet parent of this loving pair
  Whom nothing could divide.

And ye who, rather than resign
  Your matrimonial plan,
Were not afraid to plough the brine
  In company with man;

For whose lean country much disdain
  We English often show,
Yet from a richer nothing gain
  But wantonness and wo:

Be it your fortune, year by year,
  The same resource to prove,
And may ye, sometimes landing here,
  Instruct us how to love!

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TO

WILLIAM HAYLEY, ESQ.

[JUNE 29, 1793.]

[This was addressed to Hayley, on his proposing to Cowper that they should write in "literary partnership" a poem, to be called "The Four Ages."]

DEAR architect of fine *chateaux* in air,
Worthier to stand for ever, if they could,
Than any built of stone, or yet of wood,
For back of royal elephant to bear!
Oh, for permission from the skies to share,
Much to my own, though little to thy good,
With thee (not subject to the jealous mood!)
A partnership of literary ware!
But I am bankrupt now, and doom'd henceforth
To drudge, in descant dry, on others' lays,—
Bards, I acknowledge, of unequall'd worth;
But what is commentator's happiest praise?
That he has furnish'd lights for other eyes,
Which they who need them use, and then despise.

ON

A SPANIEL

CALLED BEAU, KILLING A YOUNG BIRD.

[JULY 15, 1793.]

A SPANIEL, Beau, that fares like you,
Well fed, and at his ease,
Should wiser be than to pursue
Each trifle that he sees.

But you have kill'd a tiny bird,
Which flew not till to-day,
Against my orders, whom you heard
Forbidding you the prey.

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Nor did you kill that you might eat
  And ease a doggish pain,
For him, though chased with furious heat,
  You left where he was slain.

Nor was he of the thievish sort,
  Or, one whom blood allures,
But innocent was all his sport
  Whom you have torn for yours.

My dog! what remedy remains,
  Since, teach you all I can,
I see you, after all my pains,
  So much resemble man?

BEAU'S REPLY.

Sir, when I flew to seize the bird
  In spite of your command,
A louder voice than yours I heard,
  And harder to withstand.

You cried Forbear—but in my breast
  A mightier cried, Proceed:
'Twas Nature, sir, whose strong behest
  Impell'd me to the deed.

Yet much as Nature I respect,
  I ventured once to break
(As you, perhaps, may recollect)
  Her precept for your sake;

And when your linnet on a day,
  Passing his prison door,
Had flutter'd all his strength away,
  And panting press'd the floor,

Well knowing him a sacred thing,
  Not destined to my tooth,
I only kiss'd his ruffled wing,
  And lick'd the feathers smooth.

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Let my obedience then excuse
My disobedience now,
Nor some reproof yourself refuse
From your aggrieved Bow-wow;

If killing birds be such a crime,
(Which I can hardly see,)
What think you, sir, of killing Time
With verse address'd to me?

ON

RECEIVING HEYNE'S VIRGIL

FROM MR HAYLEY.

[OCTOBER, 1793.]

I SHOULD have deem'd it once an effort vain
To sweeten more sweet Maro's matchless strain,
But from that error now behold me free,
Since I received him as a gift from thee.

TO MARY.

[How well this tribute of admiration and attachment was merited—a tribute expressive at once of all that is purest, yet most ardent, in affection—appears from the following passage in one of Lady Hesketh's letters to her sister:—"Mrs Unwin is very far from grave: on the contrary, she is cheerful and gay, and laughs, *de bon cœur*, upon the smallest provocation. Amidst all the little puritanical words which fall from her *de tems en tems*, she seems to have by nature a great fund of gaiety—great, indeed, must it have been, not to have been totally overcome by the close confinement in which she has lived, and the anxiety she must have undergone for one whom she certainly loves as well as one human being can love another. I will not say she idolizes him, because that she would think wrong, but she certainly seems to possess the truest regard and affection for this excellent creature; and, as I before said, has, in the most literal sense of the word, no will or shadow of inclination but what is *his*. How she has supported herself as she has done—the constant attendance, day and night, which she has gone through for the last thirteen years—is to me, I confess, incredible! and, in justice to her, I must say, she does it

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all with an ease that relieves you from any idea of its being a state of sufferance. She speaks of him in the highest terms; and by her astonishing management, he is never mentioned in Olney but with the highest respect and veneration." The poem was written in the autumn of 1793.]

The twentieth year is well nigh past,
Since first our sky was overcast,
Ah, would that this might be the last,
My Mary!

Thy spirits have a fainter flow,
I see thee daily weaker grow—
'Twas my distress that brought thee low,
My Mary!

Thy needles, once a shining store,
For my sake restless heretofore,
Now rust disused, and shine no more,
My Mary!

For though thou gladly would'st fulfil
The same kind office for me still,
Thy sight now seconds not thy will,
My Mary!

But well thou play'dst the housewife's part,
And all thy threads with magic art
Have wound themselves about this heart,
My Mary!

Thy indistinct expressions seem
Like language utter'd in a dream;
Yet me they charm, whate'er the theme,
My Mary!

Thy silver locks, once auburn bright,
Are still more lovely in my sight
Than golden beams of orient light,
My Mary!

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For could I view nor them nor thee,
What sight worth seeing could I see?
The sun would rise in vain for me,
My Mary!

Partakers of thy sad decline,
Thy hands their little force resign;
Yet gently prest, press gently mine,
My Mary!

Such feebleness of limbs thou provest,
That now at every step thou movest
Upheld by two, yet still thou lovest,
My Mary!

And still to love, though prest with ill,
In wintry age to feel no chill,
With me is to be lovely still,
My Mary!

But, ah! by constant heed I know,
How oft the sadness that I show,
Transforms thy smiles to looks of wo,
My Mary!

And should my future lot be cast
With much resemblance of the past,
Thy worn-out heart will break at last,
My Mary!

MORTUARY STANZAS FOR 1793.

De sacris autem hæc sit una sententia, ut conserventur.
Cic. *de Leg.*

But let us all concur in this one sentiment, that things sacred be inviolate.

He lives, who lives to God alone,
And all are dead beside;
For other source than God is none
Whence life can be supplied.

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To live to God is to requite
  His love as best we may;
To make his precepts our delight,
  His promises our stay.

But life, within a narrow ring
  Of giddy joys comprised,
Is falsely named, and no such thing,
  But rather death disguised.

Can life in them deserve the name,
  Who only live to prove
For what poor toys they can disclaim
  An endless life above?

Who, much diseased, yet nothing feel,
  Much menaced, nothing dread;
Have wounds, which only God can heal,
  Yet never ask his aid?

Who deem his house a useless place,
  Faith, want of common sense;
And ardour in the Christian race,
  A hypocrite's pretence?

Who trample order; and the day,
  Which God asserts his own,
Dishonour with unhallow'd play,
  And worship chance alone?

If scorn of God's commands, impress'd
  On word and deed, imply
The better part of man unbless'd
  With life that cannot die:

Such want it, and that want, uncured
  Till man resigns his breath,
Speaks him a criminal, assured
  Of everlasting death.

Sad period to a pleasant course!
  Yet so will God repay
Sabbaths profaned without remorse,
  And mercy cast away.

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ON

THE ICE ISLANDS,

SEEN FLOATING IN THE GERMAN OCEAN.

[This poem, suggested by a circumstance which had some time before been read to the poet, from the Norwich newspaper, without his seeming to notice it, was first written in Latin, on the 11th, and afterwards translated into English on the 19th March, 1799.]

WHAT portents, from what distant region, ride,
Unseen till now in ours, the astonish'd tide?
In ages past, old Proteus, with his droves
Of sea-calves, sought the mountains and the groves;
But now, descending whence of late they stood,
Themselves the mountains seem to rove the flood.
Dire times were they, full charged with human woes;
And these, scarce less calamitous than those.
What view we now? More wondrous still! Behold!
Like burnish'd brass they shine, or beaten gold;
And all around the pearl's pure splendour show,
And all around the ruby's fiery glow.
Come they from India, where the burning earth,
All bounteous, gives her richest treasures birth;
And where the costly gems, that beam around
The brows of mightiest potentates, are found?
No. Never such a countless dazzling store
Had left, unseen, the Ganges' peopled shore.
Rapacious hands, and ever-watchful eyes,
Should sooner far have mark'd and seized the prize.
Whence sprang they then? Ejected have they come
From Ves'vius', or from Ætna's burning womb?
Thus shine they self-illumed, or but display
The borrow'd splendours of a cloudless day?
With borrow'd beams they shine. The gales, that breathe
Now landward, and the current's force beneath,
Have borne them nearer: and the nearer sight,
Advantaged more, contemplates them aright.
Their lofty summits crested high, they show,
With mingled sleet and long incumbent snow,

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The rest is ice. Far hence, where, most severe,
Bleak winter well-nigh saddens all the year,
Their infant growth began. He bade arise
Their uncouth forms, portentous in our eyes.
Oft as, dissolved by transient suns, the snow
Left the tall cliff, to join the flood below,
He caught, and curdled with a freezing blast,
The current, ere it reach'd the boundless waste.
By slow degrees uprose the wondrous pile,
And long successive ages roll'd the while,
Till, ceaseless in its growth, it claim'd to stand
Tall as its rival mountains on the land.
Thus stood, and, unremovable by skill
Or force of man, had stood the structure still;
But that, though firmly fix'd, supplanted yet
By pressure of its own enormous weight,
It left the shelving beach—and, with a sound
That shook the bellowing waves and rocks around,
Self-lanch'd, and swiftly, to the briny wave,
As if instinct with strong desire to lave,
Down went the ponderous mass. So bards of old,
How Delos swam the Ægean deep, have told.
But not of ice was Delos. Delos bore
Herb, fruit, and flower. She, crown'd with laurel, wore,
Even under wintry skies, a summer smile;
And Delos was Apollo's favourite isle.
But, horrid wanderers of the deep, to you
He deems Cimmerian darkness only due.
Your hated birth he deign'd not to survey,
But, scornful, turn'd his glorious eyes away.
Hence! Seek your home, nor longer rashly dare
The darts of Phœbus, and a softer air;
Lest ye regret, too late, your native coast,
In no congenial gulf for ever lost!

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THE CASTAWAY.

[This, the last original poem composed by Cowper, was written under the most appalling mental depression; yet, being finished in one day, 20th March, 1799, and founded on an incident in Anson's Voyage, a book which he had not looked into for twenty years before, it evinces in a striking manner the powers of his mind.]

Obscurest night involved the sky,
  The Atlantic billows roar'd,
When such a distant wretch as I,
  Wash'd headlong from on board;
Of friends, of hope, of all bereft,
His floating home for ever left.

No braver chief could Albion boast
  Than he with whom he went,
Nor ever ship left Albion's coast
  With warmer wishes sent.
He loved them both, but both in vain,
Nor him beheld, nor her again.

Not long beneath the whelming brine,
  Expert to swim, he lay;
Nor soon he felt his strength decline,
  Or courage die away;
But waged with death a lasting strife,
Supported by despair of life.

He shouted: nor his friends had fail'd
  To check the vessel's course,
But so the furious blast prevail'd,
  That, pitiless, per force
They left their outcast mate behind,
And scudded still before the wind.

Some succour yet they could afford;
  And such as storms allow,
The cask, the coop, the floated cord,
  Delay'd not to bestow.
But he, they knew, nor ship nor shore,
Whate'er they gave, should visit more.

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Nor, cruel as it seem'd, could he
  Their haste himself condemn,
Aware that flight, in such a sea,
  Alone could rescue them;
Yet bitter felt it still to die
Deserted, and his friends so nigh.

He long survives who lives an hour
  In ocean, self-upheld:
And so long he, with unspent power,
  His destiny repell'd;
And ever as the minutes flew,
Entreated help, or cried—"Adieu!"

At length, his transient respite past,
  His comrades, who before
Had heard his voice in every blast,
  Could catch the sound no more.
For then, by toil subdued, he drank
The stifling wave, and then he sank.

No poet wept him: but the page
  Of narrative sincere,
That tells his name, his worth, his age,
  Is wet with Anson's tear;
And tears by bards or heroes shed
Alike immortalize the dead.

I therefore purpose not, or dream,
  Descanting on his fate,
To give the melancholy theme
  A more enduring date.
But misery still delights to trace
Its 'semblance in another's case.

No voice divine the storm allay'd,
  No light propitious shone;
When, snatch'd from all effectual aid,
  We perish'd, each alone:
But I beneath a rougher sea,
And whelm'd in deeper gulfs than he.

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The following three Poems have been omitted in their proper order.

HUMAN FRAILTY.

[1780.]

WEAK and irresolute is man;
  The purpose of to-day,
Woven with pains into his plan,
  To-morrow rends away.

The bow well bent, and smart the spring,
  Vice seems already slain;
But passion rudely snaps the string,
  And it revives again.

Some foe to his upright intent
  Finds out his weaker part;
Virtue engages his assent,
  But pleasure wins his heart.

'Tis here the folly of the wise
  Through all his art we view;
And, while his tongue the charge denies,
  His conscience owns it true.

Bound on a voyage of awful length,
  And dangers little known—
A stranger to superior strength,
  Man vainly trusts his own.

But oars alone can ne'er prevail
  To reach the distant coast;
The breath of heaven must swell the sail,
  Or all the toil is lost.

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AN EPISTLE

TO A PROTESTANT LADY IN FRANCE.

[1782.]

MADAM,

A STRANGER's purpose in these lays
Is to congratulate, and not to praise.
To give the creature her Creator's due
Were sin in me, and an offence to you.
From man to man, or even to woman paid,
Praise is the medium of a knavish trade,
A coin by craft for folly's use design'd,
Spurious, and only current with the blind.

The path of sorrow, and that path alone,
Leads to the land where sorrow is unknown;
No traveller ever reach'd that blest abode,
Who found not thorns and briers in his road.
The world may dance along the flowery plain,
Cheer'd as they go by many a sprightly strain,
Where nature has her mossy velvet spread,
With unshod feet they yet securely tread,
Admonish'd, scorn the caution and the friend,
Bent upon pleasure, heedless of its end.
But he, who knew what human hearts would prove,
How slow to learn the dictates of his love,
That hard by nature and of stubborn will,
A life of ease would make them harder still;
In pity to the sinners he design'd
To rescue from the ruins of mankind,
Call'd for a cloud to darken all their years,
And said, "Go spend them in the vale of tears."
Oh, balmy gales of soul-reviving air,
Oh, salutary streams that murmur there,
These flowing from the fount of grace above,
Those breathed from lips of everlasting love!

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The flinty soil indeed their feet annoys,
And sudden sorrow nips their springing joys,
An envious world will interpose its frown
To mar delights superior to its own,
And many a pang, experienced still within,
Reminds them of their hated inmate, sin;
But ills of every shape and every name
Transform'd to blessings miss their cruel aim,
And every moment's calm, that soothes the breast,
Is given in earnest of eternal rest.

Ah, be not sad, although thy lot be cast
Far from the flock, and in a distant waste!
No shepherd's tents within thy view appear,
But the Chief Shepherd is for ever near;
Thy tender sorrows and thy plaintive strain
Flow in a foreign land, but not in vain;
Thy tears all issue from a source divine,
And every drop bespeaks a Saviour thine—
'Twas thus in Gideon's fleece the dews were found,
And drought on all the drooping herds around.

INSCRIPTION

FOR THE TOMB OF MR HAMILTON.

[1784.]

Pause here, and think: a monitory rhyme
Demands one moment of thy fleeting time.
Consult life's silent clock, thy bounding vein;
Seems it to say—"Health here has long to reign?"
Hast thou the vigour of thy youth? an eye
That beams delight? an heart untaught to sigh?
Yet fear. Youth ofttimes, healthful and at ease,
Anticipates a day it never sees;
And many a tomb, like Hamilton's, aloud
Exclaims, "Prepare thee for an early shroud."

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HYMNS.

THESE compositions, so beautiful in their execution, so important in their objects, are now, for the first time, incorporated with the other original works of the author. They were written, with a few exceptions, which belong to the last months of his residence at St Alban's, between the years 1769 and 1772. Hitherto they have appeared only as originally published by Newton, interspersed in a numerous collection of his own pieces, where the peculiar excellence of only sixty-eight short poems was liable to be overlooked, or at least where they in a great measure lost their distinctive character. The particular dates of the separate hymns not having been preserved, that arrangement has been adopted as the best which promised most clearly to impress their practical or exegetical nature. With this view they have been divided into three heads, of PRAISE, PRAYER, and DOCTRINE, forming an admirable manual of personal devotion, in which the Christian will find the purest models of a simple and sublime service or instructive declarations of faith. There can hardly be a religious disposition of mind which does not discern, even in this small number of pious aspirations, a suitable form of thanksgiving or of petition; and scarcely a depression can sadden, or a doubt distress the heart, under which comfort, or at least religious expression, is not found here. The Olney Hymns exhibit the lights and shadows of a believer's life, and thus, more than other sacred poetry, do they come home to the heart, with the efficacy both of precept and example. Like all the poetry of Cowper, they possess an individuality that permits not a suspicion of their sincerity, while the universal interest of their topics identifies their experiences with those of all Christians. As literary performances their

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merits are great—the language is noble, the versification easy, and the imagery poetical, without merging the sanctity of devotion in the sentiment of poetry. In these respects, Cowper surpasses all competitors: his performances are neither odes—admired, because understood only by the refined, and that rather for elegance than piety, like one school; neither, like the productions of the other, are they so divested of ornament as to derive their sole merit from good intention. Cowper, as a sacred classic, here concentrates all his peculiar Christian excellencies as a poet. His general sincerity becomes, in these hymns, a heavenly-mindedness, an uncalculating, unhesitating devotedness of every feeling and interest to the glory of God. The ordinary unrestrained and regardless flow of his verse, expressive of earnest conviction of the truths which he utters, rises here into a spontaneous, an unconscious, burst of gratitude and love to Him whose grace is operating unspeakable renewings of purity and gladness in a heart constrained thus to sing aloud for very joy. At other seasons, the cry comes from the depths of some heart, breaking and forsaken, yet still confiding in the mercy of Jehovah. Thus, under whatever impression of gospel dispensations Cowper may speak, he speaks here in comfort to the seeking mourner, as well as to the rejoicing believer, and in language so affecting, by its union of faith and poesy, as can hardly fail to touch a responsive chord in every breast.

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OLNEY HYMNS.

I.—PRAISE.

I.

[The poet extols the comforts and invokes the aid of divine grace in the course of Christian retirement upon which he is about to enter. The hymn was written at St Alban's, on his recovery there of bodily health and mental peace, being one of those compositions named by himself "Specimens of my first Christian thoughts." It was afterwards given to Newton, and thus inserted in the Olney collection.]

FAR from the world, O Lord, I flee,
From strife and tumult far;
From scenes where Satan wages still
His most successful war.

The calm retreat, the silent shade,
With prayer and praise agree;
And seem by thy sweet bounty made
For those who follow thee.

There, if thy Spirit touch the soul,
And grace her mean abode,
Oh, with what peace, and joy, and love,
She communes with her God!

There, like the nightingale, she pours
Her solitary lays:
Nor asks a witness of her song,
Nor thirsts for human praise.

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Author and Guardian of my life,
  Sweet source of light divine,
And (all harmonious names in one)
  My Saviour! thou art mine.

What thanks I owe thee, and what love,
  A boundless, endless store,
Shall echo through the realms above
  When time shall be no more.

II.

[The joy of reconciliation with God. Written during one of those happy releases from depression which Cowper continued to enjoy during the first years of his residence at Olney.]

I WILL praise thee every day,
Now thine anger 's turn'd away!
Comfortable thoughts arise
From the bleeding sacrifice.

Here, in the fair gospel field,
Wells of free salvation yield
Streams of life, a plenteous store,
And my soul shall thirst no more.

Jesus is become at length
My salvation and my strength;
And his praises shall prolong,
While I live, my pleasant song.

Praise ye then his glorious name,
Publish his exalted fame!
Still his worth your praise exceeds,
Excellent are all his deeds.

Raise again the joyful sound,
Let the nations roll it round!
Zion, shout, for this is he,
God the Saviour dwells in thee!

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III.

[The secret joys of a saving faith in Christ. Written also at St Alban's, soon after what has been termed "Cowper's conversion;" that is, after distress of mind and body, and the desertion of the world, had taught him the vanity of all sublunary comforts without God. The appeal to his "former friends" is an affecting proof of sincerity. To this hymn he himself gave the expressive title, "The hidden life."]

To tell the Saviour all my wants,
  How pleasing is the task!
Nor less to praise him when he grants
  Beyond what I can ask.

My labouring spirit vainly seeks
  To tell but half the joy:
With how much tenderness he speaks,
  And helps me to reply!

Nor were it wise, nor should I choose,
  Such secrets to declare;
Like precious wines, their taste they lose
  Exposed to open air.

But this with boldness I proclaim,
  Nor care if thousands hear,
Sweet is the ointment of his name,
  Not life is half so dear.

And can you frown, my former friends,
  Who knew what once I was;
And blame the song that thus commends
  The Man who bore the cross?

Trust me, I draw the likeness true,
  And not as fancy paints;
Such honour may he give to you,
  For such have all his saints.

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IV.

[The praises of redeeming love. The close of the hymn is most beautiful.]

THERE is a fountain fill'd with blood,
  Drawn from Emmanuel's veins,
And sinners plunged beneath that flood,
  Lose all their guilty stains.

The dying thief rejoiced to see
  That fountain in his day;
And there have I, as vile as he,
  Wash'd all my sins away.

Dear dying Lamb, thy precious blood
  Shall never lose its power,
Till all the ransom'd church of God
  Be saved to sin no more.

E'er since, by faith, I saw the stream
  Thy flowing wounds supply,
Redeeming love has been my theme,
  And shall be till I die.

Then in a nobler, sweeter song,
  I'll sing thy power to save;
When this poor lisping, stammering tongue
  Lies silent in the grave.

Lord, I believe thou hast prepared
  (Unworthy though I be)
For me a blood-bought free reward,
  A golden harp for me!

'Tis strung, and tuned for endless years,
  And form'd by power divine;
To sound in God the Father's ears
  No other name but thine.

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V.

[The divine wisdom, as displayed in the work of creation and redemption. The imagery of the first stanza is full of graceful beauty; the opening of the second is sublime; and scarcely any transition can be more happily executed than passing from the mysterious revelations of the Old, to the realized love of the New Testament. Proverbs, viii. 22—31.]

Ere God had built the mountains,
  Or raised the fruitful hills;
Before he fill'd the fountains
  That feed the running rills;
In me, from everlasting,
  The wonderful I AM,
Found pleasures never wasting,
  And Wisdom is my name.

When like a tent to dwell in,
  He spread the skies abroad,
And swathed about the swelling
  Of ocean's mighty flood;
He wrought by weight and measure;
  And I was with him then:
Myself the Father's pleasure,
  And mine the sons of men.

Thus wisdom's words discover
  Thy glory and thy grace,
Thou everlasting lover
  Of our unworthy race!
Thy gracious eye survey'd us
  Ere stars were seen above;
In wisdom thou hast made us,
  And died for us in love.

And couldst thou be delighted
  With creatures such as we,
Who, when we saw thee, slighted
  And nail'd thee to a tree?
Unfathomable wonder!
  And mystery divine!
The voice that speaks in thunder,
  Says, "Sinner, I am thine!"

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VI.

[The obligations of the sinner to Christ. Tender and persuasive, the last verse must touch every breast that has ever felt how inefficient is the *will* without the *grace* to love. John, xxi. 16.]

HARK, my soul! it is the Lord;
'Tis thy Saviour, hear his word;
Jesus speaks, and speaks to thee:
"Say, poor sinner, lovest thou me?

"I deliver'd thee when bound,
And, when bleeding, heal'd thy wound;
Sought thee wandering, set thee right,
Turn'd thy darkness into light.

"Can a woman's tender care
Cease toward the child she bare?
Yes, she may forgetful be,
Yet I will remember thee.

"Mine is an unchanging love,
Higher than the heights above,
Deeper than the depths beneath,
Free and faithful, strong as death.

"Thou shalt see my glory soon,
When the work of grace is done;
Partner of my throne shalt be;
Say, poor sinner, lovest thou me?"

Lord, it is my chief complaint,
That my love is cold and faint;
Yet I love thee and adore,
O for grace to love thee more!

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VII.

[The eternal Godhead of the Son. A Christmas hymn, of which it has been well remarked, that it is written "in a strain of noble simplicity, expressive of a confidence the most remote from presumption, and such as a heart at peace with God alone could enjoy or utter."]

My song shall bless the Lord of all,
  My praise shall climb to his abode;
Thee, Saviour, by that name I call,
  The great Supreme, the mighty God.

Without beginning or decline,
  Object of faith, and not of sense;
Eternal ages saw him shine,
  He shines eternal ages hence.

As much when in the manger laid,
  Almighty Ruler of the sky,
As when the six days' work he made
  Fill'd all the morning stars with joy.

Of all the crowns Jehovah bears,
  Salvation is his dearest claim;
That gracious sound well pleased he hears,
  And owns Emmanuel for his name.

A cheerful confidence I feel,
  My well-placed hopes with joy I see:
My bosom glows with heavenly zeal
  To worship Him who died for me.

As man he pities my complaint,
  His power and truth are all divine;
He will not fail, he cannot faint,
  Salvation 's sure, and must be mine.

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VIII.

[Invitation to the Lord's Table, a communion hymn — simple and affecting. The trembling consciousness of a soul sensible of sin, and awakening to the perception of its condition, is touchingly, yet encouragingly portrayed.]

THIS is the feast of heavenly wine,
And God invites to sup;
The juices of the living Vine
Were press'd to fill the cup.

O bless the Saviour, ye that eat,
With royal dainties fed;
Not heaven affords a costlier treat,
For Jesus is the bread.

The vile, the lost, he calls to them,
Ye trembling souls, appear!
The righteous in their own esteem
Have no acceptance here.

Approach, ye poor, nor dare refuse
The banquet spread for you.
Dear Saviour, this is welcome news,
Then I may venture too.

If guilt and sin afford a plea,
And may obtain a place,
Surely the Lord will welcome me,
And I shall see his face.

IX.

[The sufferings of the Redeemer, and love their cause; a sacramental hymn. "Who," it has been asked, "can read and understand this, without feeling as if he could at such a moment forsake all, take up his cross, and follow the Saviour?" May this feeling never prove a passing aspiration — a momentary elevation of the temperature merely of devotion — such as few fail to experience at the Lord's table, but which speedily sinks again in the cold atmosphere of worldly thought.]

THE Saviour, what a noble flame
Was kindled in his breast,
When hasting to Jerusalem,
He march'd before the rest!

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Good-will to men, and zeal for God,
  His every thought engross;
He longs to be baptised with blood,*
  He pants to reach the cross.

With all his sufferings full in view,
  And woes to us unknown,
Forth to the task his spirit flew;
  'Twas love that urged him on.

Lord, we return thee what we can!
  Our hearts shall sound abroad,
Salvation to the dying Man,
  And to the rising God!

And while thy bleeding glories here
  Engage our wondering eyes,
We learn our lighter cross to bear,
  And hasten to the skies.

X.

[The influences of grace in sanctifying and interpreting gospel ordinances for the edification of the believer. The versification of this hymn possesses uncommon ease and suavity. The last verse is most exquisite, both in thought and language.]

The Spirit breathes upon the word,
  And brings the truth to sight;
Precepts and promises afford
  A sanctifying light.

A glory gilds the sacred page,
  Majestic like the sun;
It gives a light to every age,
  It gives, but borrows none.

The hand that gave thee still supplies
  The gracious light and heat;
His truths upon the nations rise,
  They rise, but never set.

* Luke, xii. 50.

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Let everlasting thanks be thine,
For such a bright display,
As makes a world of darkness shine
With beams of heavenly day.

My soul rejoices to pursue
The steps of him I love,
Till glory breaks upon my view
In brighter worlds above.

XI.

[Comforts of the gospel in sanctifying affliction. A composition peculiarly affecting, from its personal experiences and allusions. How can heavenly longing be more fervently expressed than in the beautiful close of this hymn?]

O HOW I love thy holy word,
Thy gracious covenant, O Lord!
It guides me in the peaceful way;
I think upon it all the day.

What are the mines of shining wealth,
The strength of youth, the bloom of health;
What are all joys compared with those
Thine everlasting word bestows!

Long unafflicted, undismay'd,
In pleasure's path secure I stray'd;
Thou madest me feel thy chastening rod,*
And straight I turn'd unto my God.

What though it pierced my fainting heart,
I bless'd thine hand that caused the smart:
It taught my tears awhile to flow,
But saved me from eternal woe.

Oh! hadst thou left me unchastised,
Thy precept I had still despised;
And still the snare in secret laid,
Had my unwary feet betray'd.

* Psalm cxix. 71.

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I lòve thee, therefore, O my God,
And breathe towards thy dear abode;
Where, in thy presence fully blest,
Thy chosen saints for ever rest.

XII.

[The inward delights of the Christian in gospel meditation and fellowship. On this head how exquisitely touching is the second stanza! the more so that an actual incident in his life proves that here Cowper wrote, as he ever does on religion, from the heart.]

LORD, my soul with pleasure springs,
When Jesus' name I hear;
And when God the Spirit brings
The word of promise near:
Beauties, too, in holiness,
Still delighted I perceive;
Nor have words that can express
The joys thy precepts give.

Clothed in sanctity and grace,
How sweet it is to see
Those who love thee as they pass,
Or when they wait on thee!
Pleasant, too, to sit and tell
What we owe to love divine;
Till our bosoms grateful swell,
And eyes begin to shine.

Those the comforts I possess,
Which God shall still increase,
All his ways are pleasantness,*
And all his paths are peace.
Nothing Jesus did or spoke,
Henceforth let me ever slight;
For I love his easy yoke,†
And find his burden light.

* Prov. iii. 17. † Matt. xi. 30.

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XIII.

[The joy and peace of believing. It is difficult to say whether the opening lines of this hymn be more sweetly in accordance with the humble believer's experience, or more delightful in their application of images of earth to the dispensations of Heaven.]

SOMETIMES a light surprises
  The Christian while he sings;
It is the Lord who rises
  With healing in his wings:
When comforts are declining,
  He grants the soul again
A season of clear shining,
  To cheer it after rain.

In holy contemplation,
  We sweetly then pursue
The theme of God's salvation,
  And find it ever new.
Set free from present sorrow,
  We cheerfully can say,
Even let the unknown to-morrow*
  Bring with it what it may;

It can bring with it nothing,
  But he will bear us through;
Who gives the lilies clothing,
  Will clothe his people too;
Beneath the spreading heavens,
  No creature but is fed;
And he who feeds the ravens,
  Will give his children bread.

Though vine nor fig-tree neither †
  Their wonted fruit shall bear,
Though all the fields should wither,
  Nor flocks nor herds be there:
Yet God the same abiding,
  His praise shall tune my voice;
For, while in him confiding,
  I cannot but rejoice.

* Matt. vi. 34. † Hab. iii. 17, 18.

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XIV.

[Regeneration, and praise for spiritual blessings. Of this truly evangelical composition it has been remarked, — "It presents a transformation, which, if found in Ovid, might have been extolled as the happiest of his fictions." Fictions of Ovid! — the Christian joys to know that here all is truth; while the man of taste, who is not ashamed to own his admiration, will prefer the beauty of this simple allegory to all the elaborated pomp of the Roman.

I WAS a grovelling creature once,
And basely cleaved to earth;
I wanted spirit to renounce
The clod that gave me birth.

But God has breathed upon a worm,
And sent me from above,
Wings such as clothe an angel's form,
The wings of joy and love.

With these to Pisgah's top I fly,
And there delighted stand,
To view beneath a shining sky
The spacious promised land.

The Lord of all the vast domain
Has promised it to me;
The length and breadth of all the plain,
As far as faith can see.

How glorious is my privilege!
To thee for help I call;
I stand upon a mountain's edge,
O save me, lest I fall.

Though much exalted in the Lord,
My strength is not my own;
Then let me tremble at his word,
And none shall cast me down.

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XV.

[Pardoning, sanctifying, and sustaining love, constrain to obedience by changing "duty into choice."]

No strength of nature can suffice
  To serve the Lord aright;
And what she has she misapplies,
  For want of clearer light.

How long beneath the law I lay
  In bondage and distress!
I toil'd the precept to obey,
  But toil'd without success.

Then, to abstain from outward sin,
  Was more than I could do;
Now, if I feel its power within,
  I feel I hate it too.

Then all my servile works were done
  A righteousness to raise;
Now, freely chosen in the Son,
  I freely choose his ways.

What shall I do, was then the word,
  That I may worthier grow?
What shall I render to the Lord?
  Is my inquiry now.

To see the law by Christ fulfill'd,
  And hear his pardoning voice,
Changes a slave into a child,*
  And duty into choice.

* Romans, iii. 31.

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XVI.

[All comforts, temporal as well as spiritual, come from God. The contrasts which the hymn presents between the condescending providence of God towards his creatures, and his own infinite exaltation, are well calculated to warm devotion; and the fourth stanza is sweetly adapted to tranquillize the heart, amid painful misgivings.]

ALMIGHTY King! whose wondrous hand
Supports the weight of sea and land,
Whose grace is such a boundless store,
No heart shall break that sighs for more.

Thy providence supplies my food,
And 'tis thy blessing makes it good;
My soul is nourish'd by thy word—
Let soul and body praise the Lord.

My streams of outward comfort came
From him who built this earthly frame;
Whate'er I want his bounty gives,
By whom my soul for ever lives.

Either his hand preserves from pain,
Or, if I feel it, heals again;
From Satan's malice shields my breast,
Or overrules it for the best.

Forgive the song that falls so low
Beneath the gratitude I owe!
It means thy praise, however poor,
An angel's song can do no more.

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XVII.

[Praise for spiritual truth. The sentiments are reproduced in a different form in one of the most splendid passages in the Task, where God is justly represented as the best of his own gracious gifts.]

Of all the gifts thine hand bestows,
  Thou Giver of all good!
Not heaven itself a richer knows,
  Than my Redeemer's blood.

Faith, too, the blood-receiving grace,
  From the same hand we gain;
Else, sweetly as it suits our case,
  That gift had been in vain.

Till thou thy teaching power apply
  Our hearts refuse to see,
And weak, as a distemper'd eye,
  Shut out the view of thee.

Blind to the merits of thy Son,
  What misery we endure!
Yet fly that hand, from which alone
  We could expect a cure.

We praise thee, and would praise thee more,
  To thee our all we owe;
The precious Saviour, and the power
  That makes him precious too.

XVIII.

[Praise due from man at all seasons: a delightful composition, in the very harmony of which there is a glad movement inspiring cheerful gratitude and love. The fifth and sixth verses have a solemn tenderness which comes over the mind with the purity and calm of the seasons and imagery which they describe.]

Winter has a joy for me,
  While the Saviour's charms I read,
Lowly, meek, from blemish free,
  In the snow-drop's pensive head.

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Spring returns, and brings along
  Life-invigorating suns:
Hark! the turtle's plaintive song
  Seems to speak his dying groans!

Summer has a thousand charms,
  All expressive of his worth;
'Tis his sun that lights and warms,
  His the air that cools the earth.

What! has autumn left to say
  Nothing of a Saviour's grace?
Yes, the beams of milder day
  Tell me of his smiling face.

Light appears with early dawn;
  While the sun makes haste to rise,
See his bleeding beauties drawn
  On the blushes of the skies.

Evening with a silent pace,
  Slowly moving in the west,
Shews an emblem of his grace,
  Points to an eternal rest.

II. — PRAYER.

XIX.

[The duty, the comforts, and the effects of prayer: a truly scriptural exposition of this ordinance.]

What various hindrances we meet
In coming to a mercy-seat!
Yet who that knows the worth of prayer,
But wishes to be often there?

Prayer makes the darken'd cloud withdraw,
Prayer climbs the ladder Jacob saw,
Gives exercise to faith and love,
Brings every blessing from above.

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Restraining prayer, we cease to fight;
Prayer makes the Christian's armour bright;
And Satan trembles when he sees
The weakest saint upon his knees.

While Moses stood with arms spread wide,
Success was found on Israel's side;
But when through weariness they fail'd,
That moment Amalek prevail'd.

Have you no words? Ah! think again,
Words flow apace when you complain,
And fill your fellow-creature's ear
With the sad tale of all your care.

Were half the breath thus vainly spent,
To Heaven in supplication sent,
Your cheerful song would oftener be,
"Hear what the Lord has done for me."

XX.

[Mourning the withdrawal of heavenly communion, and imploring a renewal of that peace which passeth all understanding. An aspiration affecting in reference to its author, and coming home to the personal experience of all humble and sincere Christians, for all such have at times felt as if the Lord had forgotten to be gracious.]

Oh! for a closer walk with God,
A calm and heavenly frame;
A light to shine upon the road
That leads me to the Lamb!

Where is the blessedness I knew,
When first I saw the Lord?
Where is the soul-refreshing view
Of Jesus, and his word?

What peaceful hours I once enjoy'd!
How sweet their memory still!
But they have left an aching void
The world can never fill.

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Return, O holy dove, return,
  Sweet messenger of rest;
I hate the sins that made thee mourn,
  And drove thee from my breast.

The dearest idol I have known,
  Whate'er that idol be,
Help me to tear it from thy throne,
  And worship only thee.

So shall my walk be close with God,
  Calm and serene my frame;
So purer light shall mark the road
  That leads me to the Lamb.

XXI.

[An entreaty for the comforts of increased faith.]

Heal us, Emmanuel, here we are,
  Waiting to feel thy touch:
Deep-wounded souls to thee repair,
  And, Saviour, we are such.

Our faith is feeble, we confess,
  We faintly trust thy word;
But wilt thou pity us the less?
  Be that far from thee, Lord!

Remember him who once applied
  With trembling for relief;
"Lord, I believe," with tears he cried, *
  "O help my unbelief!"

She, too, who touch'd thee in the press,
  And healing virtue stole,
Was answer'd, "Daughter, go in peace,
  Thy faith hath made thee whole." †

* Mark, ix. 24. † Mark, v. 34.

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Conceal'd amid the gathering throng,
  She would have shunn'd thy view,
And if her faith was firm and strong,
  Had strong misgivings too.

Like her, with hopes and fears we come,
  To touch thee if we may;
Oh! send us not despairing home,
  Send none unheal'd away.

XXII.

[Imploring to be recalled from a state of indifference to the means of grace: "One of those hymns which allude to infirmities the most difficult to be described, but often the source of excruciating anguish to the tender conscience, which thousands daily suffer, and are sometimes tempted to think that they suffer alone."]

The Lord will happiness divine
  On contrite hearts bestow:
Then tell me, gracious God, is mine
  A contrite heart or no?

I hear, but seem to hear in vain,
  Insensible as steel;
If aught is felt, 'tis only pain
  To find I cannot feel.

I sometimes think myself inclined
  To love thee, if I could;
But often feel another mind,
  Averse to all that 's good.

My best desires are faint and few,
  I fain woul strive for more;
But when I cry, "My strength renew,"
  Seem weaker than before.

Thy saints are comforted, I know,
  And love thy house of prayer;
I therefore go where others go,
  But find no comfort there.

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Oh, make this heart rejoice to ache!
  Decide this doubt for me;
And if it be not broken, break,
  And heal it, if it be.

XXIII.

[Confession of shortcomings and of false hopes in self-righteousness: a practical composition of great usefulness, as proving how closely the Christian ought to interrogate his own heart concerning even its best purposes, and seemingly most self-denying affections.]

My God, how perfect are thy ways!
  But mine polluted are;
Sin twines itself about my praise,
  And slides into my prayer.

When I would speak what thou hast done
  To save me from my sin,
I cannot make thy mercies known
  But self-applause creeps in.

Divine desire, that holy flame
  Thy grace creates in me;
Alas! impatience is its name,
  When it returns to thee.

This heart, a fountain of vile thoughts,
  How does it overflow!
While self upon the surface floats,
  Still bubbling from below.

Let others in the gaudy dress
  Of fancied merit shine,
The Lord shall be my righteousness,
  The Lord for ever mine.

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XXIV.

[For aid against the occupation of the heart by carnal thoughts and desires: "a perfect allegory in miniature," it has been called, without a failing point, or confusion of metaphor, from beginning to end."]

THY mansion is the Christian's heart:
O Lord, thy dwelling-place secure!
Bid the unruly throng depart,
And leave the consecrated door.

Devoted as it is to thee,
A thievish swarm frequents the place;
They steal away my joys from me,
And rob my Saviour of his praise.

There, too, a sharp designing trade,
Sin, Satan, and the world maintain;
Nor cease to press me, and persuade,
To part with ease, and purchase pain.

I know them, and I hate their din,
Am weary of the bustling crowd;
But while their voice is heard within,
I cannot serve thee as I would.

Oh! for the joy thy presence gives,
What peace shall reign when thou art here!
Thy presence makes this den of thieves
A calm delightful house of prayer.

And if thou make thy temple shine,
Yet, self-abased, will I adore;
The gold and silver are not mine,
I give thee what was thine before.

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XXV.

[For the religious edification of youth. Composed by Cowper to be sung before an annual sermon which was delivered on the first evening of the new year to the young people of Olney parish.]

BESTOW, dear Lord, upon our youth
The gift of saving grace;
And let the seed of sacred truth
Fall in a fruitful place.

Grace is a plant, where'er it grows,
Of pure and heavenly root;
But fairest in the youngest shows,
And yields the sweetest fruit.

Ye careless ones, oh, hear betimes
The voice of sovereign love!
Your youth is stain'd with many crimes,
But mercy reigns above.

True, you are young, but there's a stone
Within the youngest breast;
Or half the crimes which you have done,
Would rob you of your rest.

For you the public prayer is made,
Oh, join the public prayer!
For you the secret tear is shed,
Oh, shed yourselves a tear!

We pray that you may early prove
The Spirit's power to teach;
You cannot be too young to love
That Jesus whom we preach.

XXVI.

[Imploring a blessing on the rising generation, that they may grow up, fearing to sin, and mindful of judgment; composed for a similar occasion.]

SIN has undone our wretched race,
But Jesus has restored,
And brought the sinner face to face
With his forgiving Lord.

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This we repeat, from year to year,
  And press upon our youth;
Lord, give them an attentive ear,
  Lord, save them by thy truth!

Blessings upon the rising race!
  Make this a happy hour,
According to thy richest grace,
  And thine almighty power.

We feel for your unhappy state,
  (May you regard it too!)
And would awhile ourselves forget,
  To pour out prayer for you.

We see, though you perceive it not,
  The approaching awful doom;
O tremble at the solemn thought,
  And flee the wrath to come!

Dear Saviour, let this new-born year
  Spread an alarm abroad;
And cry in every careless ear,
  "Prepare to meet thy God!"

XXVII.

[Prayer of pious parents for their children, first sung at an annual charity sermon. "This hymn," observes Montgomery, "closes with one of the hardiest figures to be met with out of the Hebrew Scriptures. None but a poet of the highest order could have presented such a group as in the last verse, without bombast or burlesque." We incline to ascribe the peculiar force of this passage not so much to mere poetical beauty, as to a general cause of excellence in these compositions,—a pathetic, graceful, and masterly employment of Scriptural allusion.]

Gracious Lord, our children see!
By thy mercy we are free,
But shall these, alas! remain
Subjects still of Satan's reign?

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Israel's young ones, when of old
Pharaoh threaten'd to withhold,*
Then thy messenger said, "No;
Let the children also go."

When the angel of the Lord,
Drawing forth his dreadful sword,
Slew, with an avenging hand,
All the first-born of the land;†
Then thy people's door he pass'd,
Where the bloody sign was placed:
Hear us, now, upon our knees,
Plead the blood of Christ for these!

Lord, we tremble, for we know
How the fierce malicious foe,
Wheeling round his watchful flight,
Keeps them ever in his sight:
Spread thy pinions, King of kings!
Hide them safe beneath thy wings;
Lest the ravenous bird of prey
Stoop, and bear the brood away.

XXVIII.

[Prayer for the presence of the Spirit, composed on the opening of a place of worship in the neighbourhood of Olney: a simple enunciation of the thoughts which naturally arise on such an occasion. The third and fourth verses possess peculiar energy and propriety.]

Jesus, where'er thy people meet,
There they behold thy mercy-seat;
Where'er they seek thee, thou art found,
And every place is hallow'd ground.

For thou, within no walls confined,
Inhabitest the humble mind;
Such ever bring thee where they come,
And going, take thee to their home.

* Exod. x. 9. † Exod. xii. 13.

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Dear Shepherd of thy chosen few,
Thy former mercies here renew;
Here to our waiting hearts proclaim
The sweetness of thy saving name.

Here may we prove the power of prayer,
To strengthen faith, and sweeten care;
To teach our faint desires to rise,
And bring all heaven before our eyes.

Behold, at thy commanding word,
We stretch the curtain and the cord;*
Come thou, and fill this wider space,
And bless us with a large increase.

Lord, we are few, but thou art near,
Nor short thine arm, nor deaf thine ear;
Oh, rend the heavens, come quickly down,
And make a thousand hearts thine own!

XXIX.

[For a saving reception of Christ: an aspiration after heavenly love—ardent, but perhaps too familiar in some of the expressions.]

To those who know the Lord I speak,
Is my Beloved near?
The bridegroom of my soul I seek,
Oh! when will he appear?

Though once a man of grief and shame,
Yet now he fills a throne,
And bears the greatest, sweetest name,
That earth or heaven has known.

Grace flies before, and love attends
His steps where'er he goes;
Though none can see him but his friends,
And they were once his foes.

* Isaiah, liv. 2.

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He speaks — obedient to his call
  Our warm affections move;
Did he but shine alike on all,
  Then all alike would love.

Then love in every heart would reign,
  And war would cease to roar;
And cruel and blood-thirsty men
  Would thirst for blood no more.

Such Jesus is, and such his grace,
  O may it shine on you! *
And tell him, when you see his face,
  I long to see him too.

XXX.

[Prayer in spiritual affliction — a most affecting model of tender pleading — persevering, earnest, reverential, gradually rising into the blessed confidence which springs alone from faith in the Saviour.]

God of my life, to thee I call,
Afflicted at thy feet I fall; †
When the great water-floods prevail,
Leave not my trembling heart to fail!

Friend of the friendless and the faint!
Where should I lodge my deep complaint?
Where but with thee, whose open door
Invites the helpless and the poor!

Did ever mourner plead with thee,
And thou refuse that mourner's plea?
Does not the word still fix'd remain,
That none shall seek thy face in vain?

That were a grief I could not bear,
Didst thou not hear and answer prayer;
But a prayer-hearing, answering God
Supports me under every load.

* Cant. v. 8. † Psalm lxix. 15.

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Fair is the lot that 's cast for me:
I have an Advocate with thee:
They whom the world caresses most
Have no such privilege to boast.

Poor though I am, despised, forgot,*
Yet God, my God, forgets me not;
And he is safe, and must succeed,
For whom the Lord vouchsafes to plead.

XXXI.

[Imploring aid against carnal thoughts: the personification of these and other spiritual enemies of the Christian, is in imitation of, but in elegance very superior to, a celebrated passage in Bunyan.]

My soul is sad and much dismay'd;
  See, Lord, what legions of my foes,
With fierce Apollyon at their head,
  My heavenly pilgrimage oppose!

See from the ever-burning lake,
  How like a smoky cloud they rise!
With horrid blasts my soul they shake,
  With storms of blasphemies and lies.

Their fiery arrows reach the mark,†
  My throbbing heart with anguish tear;
Each lights upon a kindred spark,
  And finds abundant fuel there.

I hate the thought that wrongs the Lord;
  Ah! I would drive it from my breast,
With thy own sharp two-edged sword,
  Far as the east is from the west.

Come then, and chase the cruel host,
  Heal the deep wounds I have received!
Nor let the powers of darkness boast,
  That I am foil'd, and thou art grieved!

* Psalm xl. 17. † Ephesians, vi. 16.

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XXXII.

[Thanksgiving for the inward consolations of grace; entreaty for a more abiding assurance of God's love. The third and fourth verses especially are simple in expression, delightful in sentiment.]

When darkness long has veil'd my mind,
And smiling day once more appears,
Then, my Redeemer, then I find,
The folly of my doubts and fears.

Straight I upbraid my wandering heart,
And blush that I should ever be
Thus prone to act so base a part,
Or harbour one hard thought of thee.

Oh! let me then at length be taught
What I am still so slow to learn,—
That God is love, and changes not,
Nor knows the shadow of a turn.

Sweet truth, and easy to repeat!
But when my faith is sharply tried
I find myself a learner yet,
Unskilful, weak, and apt to slide.

But, O my Lord, one look from thee
Subdues the disobedient will:
Drives doubt and discontent away,
And thy rebellious worm is still.

Thou art as ready to forgive
As I am ready to repine;
Thou, therefore, all the praise receive;
Be shame and self-abhorrence mine.

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XXXIII.

[Lamenting unrealized aspirations after fuller manifestations of the graces of the Spirit: a tender pleading for enlarged supplies of evangelical knowledge. Written in one of those intervals of spiritual abandonment when the eye of faith grows dim, and the shadows of inward fear overcast the sunlight of the soul — moments sad beyond expression, and far from peculiar to Cowper's case.]

THE Saviour hides his face!
  My spirit thirsts to prove
Renew'd supplies of pardoning grace,
  And never-fading love.

The favour'd souls who know
  What glories shine in him,
Pant for his presence as the roe
  Pants for the living stream!

What trifles teaze me now!
  They swarm like summer flies,
They cleave to every thing I do,
  And swim before my eyes.

How dull the Sabbath-day,
  Without the Sabbath's Lord!
How toilsome then to sing and pray,
  And wait upon the word!

Of all the truths I hear,
  How few delight my taste!
I glean a berry here and there,
  But mourn the vintage past.

Yet let me, as I ought,
  Still hope to be supplied;
No pleasure else is worth a thought,
  Nor shall I be denied.

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Though I am but a worm,
  Unworthy of his care,
The Lord will my desire perform,
  And grant me all my prayer.

XXXIV.

[Confession—angry passions, self-righteousness, and unbelief. The second verse will remind the reader of Cowper's acknowledgment, that he found irascible dispositions the most obstinate of the obstructions to personal holiness.]

DEAR Lord! accept a sinful heart,
  Which of itself complains,
And mourns with much and frequent smart,
  The evil it contains.

There fiery seeds of anger lurk,
  Which often hurt my frame,
And wait but for the tempter's work
  To fan them to a flame.

Legality holds out a bribe
  To purchase life from thee;
And discontent would fain prescribe
  How thou shalt deal with me.

While unbelief withstands thy grace,
  And puts the mercy by;
Presumption, with a brow of brass,
  Says, "Give me, or I die."

How eager are my thoughts to roam
  In quest of what they love!
But, ah! when duty calls them home,
  How heavily they move!

Oh, cleanse me in a Saviour's blood,
  Transform me by thy power,
And make me thy beloved abode,
  And let me rove no more!

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XXXV.

[For patience under afflictions: the lightness of all the sorrows of time compared with His whose atonement for us was perfected through sufferings.]

LORD, who hast suffer'd all for me,
My peace and pardon to procure,
The lighter cross I bear for thee,
Help me with patience to endure.

The storm of loud repining hush,
I would in humble silence mourn:
Why should the unburnt, though burning bush,
Be angry as the crackling thorn?

Man should not faint at thy rebuke,
Like Joshua falling on his face, *
When the cursed thing that Achan took,
Brought Israel into just disgrace.

Perhaps some golden wedge suppress'd,
Some secret sin, offends my God;
Perhaps that Babylonish vest,
Self-righteousness, provokes the rod.

Ah! were I buffeted all day,
Mock'd, crown'd with thorns, and spit upon;
I yet should have no right to say,
My great distress is mine alone.

Let me not angrily declare
No pain was ever sharp like mine;
Nor murmur at the cross I bear,
But rather weep, remembering thine.

* Joshua, vii. 10, 11.

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XXXVI.

[For strength and faith to be resigned to the Divine will — grounds of confidence in the wise and merciful providence of Jehovah.]

O Lord, my best desire fulfil,
And help me to resign
Life, health, and comfort to thy will,
And make thy pleasure mine.

Why should I shrink at thy command,
Whose love forbids my fears?
Or tremble at the gracious hand
That wipes away my tears?

No! — rather let me freely yield
What most I prize to thee,
Who never hast a good withheld,
Or wilt withhold from me.

Thy favour all my journey through,
Thou art engaged to grant;
What else I want, or think I do,
'Tis better still to want.

Wisdom and mercy guide my way,
Shall I resist them both?
A poor blind creature of a day,
And crush'd before the moth!

But, ah! my inward spirit cries,
Still bind me to thy sway,
Else the next cloud that veils the skies,
Drives all these thoughts away.

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XXXVII.

[The power of the Cross—entreaty for increase of divine gifts; earnest and spiritual in sentiment—in imagery resembling some parts of Isaiah.]

I THIRST, but not as once I did,
The vain delights of earth to share;
Thy wounds, Emmanuel, all forbid
That I should seek my pleasures there.

It was the sight of thy dear cross
First wean'd my soul from earthly things;
And taught me to esteem as dross
The mirth of fools, and pomp of kings.

I want that grace that springs from thee,
That quickens all things where it flows,
And makes a wretched thorn like me,
Bloom as the myrtle or the rose.

Dear fountain of delight unknown!
No longer sink below the brim;
But overflow, and pour me down
A living, and life-giving stream!

For sure, of all the plants that share
The notice of thy Father's eye,
None proves less grateful to his care,
Or yields him meaner fruit, than I.

III.—DOCTRINE.

XXXVIII.

[The comforts of religion contrasted with the pleasures of the world—joy of being in Christ. The last verse is exquisitely beautiful.]

O GOD, whose favourable eye
The sin-sick soul revives,
Holy and heavenly is the joy
Thy shining presence gives.

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Not such as hypocrites suppose,
  Who with a graceless heart
Taste not of thee, but drink a dose
  Prepared by Satan's art.

Intoxicating joys are theirs,
  Who, while they boast their light,
And seem to soar above the stars,
  Are plunging into night.

Lull'd in a soft and fatal sleep,
  They sin and yet rejoice;
Were they indeed the Saviour's sheep,
  Would they not hear his voice?

Be mine the comforts that reclaim
  The soul from Satan's power;
That make me blush for what I am,
  And hate my sin the more.

'Tis joy enough, my All in All,
  At thy dear feet to lie;
Thou wilt not let me lower fall,
  And none can higher fly.

XXXIX.

[Imploring the aid of divine grace, under the pressure of religious doubts and apprehensions. A most affecting composition in itself, and one of the last of the hymns written in the dismal twilight of reason, ere the intellect had finally given way, but when all the faculties were benumbed, when comfort had fled, and faith wavering, was still clinging to the wrecks of hope.]

The billows swell, the winds are high,
Clouds overcasst my wintry sky;
Out of the depths to thee I call,
My fears are great, my strength is small.

O Lord, the pilot's part perform,
And guide and guard me through the storm,
Defend me from each threatening ill,
Control the waves, say, "Peace, be still!"

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Amidst the roaring of the sea,
My soul still hangs her hope on thee;
Thy constant love, thy faithful care,
Is all that saves me from despair.

Dangers of every shape and name
Attend the followers of the Lamb,
Who leave the world's deceitful shore,
And leave it to return no more.

Though tempest-toss'd and half a wreck,
My Saviour through the flood I seek:
Let neither winds nor stormy main
Force back my shatter'd bark again.

XL.

[Exhortation to faith, and to trust in God, illustrated by scriptural examples.]

THE saints should never be dismay'd,
Nor sink in hopeless fear;
For when they least expect his aid,
The Saviour will appear.

This Abraham found: he raised the knife,
God saw, and said, "Forbear!
Yon ram shall yield his meaner life!
Behold the victim there."

Once David seem'd Saul's certain prey;
But, hark! the foe 's at hand;*
Saul turns his arms another way,
To save the invaded land.

When Jonah sunk beneath the wave,
He thought to rise no more;†
But God prepared a fish to save,
And bear him to the shore.

Blest proofs of power and grace divine,
That meet us in his word!
May every deep-felt care of mine
Be trusted with the Lord.

* 1 Sam. xxiii. 7. † Jonah, i. 17.

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Wait for his seasonable aid,
  And though it tarry, wait:
The promise may be long delay'd,
  And cannot come too late.

XLI.

[The same subject treated in a similar manner. The personal application at the close will speak to every heart that has faithfully scanned its own progress in the Christian course.]

By whom was David taught
  To aim the dreadful blow,
When he Goliath fought,
  And laid the Gittite low?
No sword nor spear the stripling took,
But chose a pebble from the brook.

'Twas Israel's God and king
  Who sent him to the fight;
Who gave him strength to sling,
  And skill to aim aright.
Ye feeble saints, your strength endures,
Because young David's God is yours.

Who order'd Gideon forth
  To storm the invader's camp,*
With arms of little worth,
  A pitcher and a lamp?
The trumpets made his coming known,
And all the host was overthrown.

Oh! I have seen the day,
  When, with a single word,
God helping me to say,
  My trust is in the Lord,
My soul has quell'd a thousand foes,
Fearless of all that could oppose.

* Judges, vii. 20.

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But unbelief, self-will,
Self-righteousness, and pride,
How often do they steal
My weapon from my side?
Yet David's Lord, and Gideon's friend,
Will help his servant to the end.

XLII.

[Atonement purchased, and reconciliation accomplished: Fears in the commencement of temptation. Written to cheer and support in the contemplation of coming calamities.]

JESUS, whose blood so freely stream'd
To satisfy the law's demand;
By thee from guilt and wrath redeem'd,
Before the Father's face I stand.

To reconcile offending man,
Made Justice drop her angry rod;
What creature could have form'd the plan,
Or who fulfil it, but a God?

No drop remains of all the curse,
For wretches who deserved the whole;
No arrows dipt in wrath to pierce
The guilty but returning soul.

Peace by such means so dearly bought,
What rebel could have hoped to see?
Peace, by his injured Sovereign wrought,
His Sovereign fasten'd to the tree.

Now, Lord, thy feeble worm prepare!
For strife with earth and hell begins;
Confirm and gird me for the war,
They hate the soul that hates his sins.

Let them in horrid league agree!
They may assault, they may distress;
But cannot quench thy love to me,
Nor rob me of the Lord my peace.

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XLIII.

[Charity; worthlessness of the world and its pleasures; the love of God through the Saviour, the only safety. How just, yet how striking the image in the third verse!]

God gives his mercies to be spent;
  Your hoard will do your soul no good:
God is a blessing only lent,
  Repaid by giving others food.

The world's esteem is but a bribe;
  To buy their peace you sell your own;
The slave of a vain-glorious tribe,
  Who hate you while they make you known.

The joy that vain amusements give,
  Oh, sad conclusion that it brings!
The honey of a crowded hive,
  Defended by a thousand stings.

'Tis thus the world rewards the fools
  That live upon her treacherous smiles:
She leads them blindfold by her rules,
  And ruins all whom she beguiles.

God knows the thousands who go down
  From pleasure into endless woe;
And, with a long despairing groan,
  Blaspheme their Maker as they go.

O fearful thought! be timely wise;
  Delight but in a Saviour's charms,
And God shall take you to the skies,
  Embraced in everlasting arms.

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XLIV.

[The rewards of faith; promises realized; peace on earth; and "God our everlasting light." A noble lyric, treating the subject in a manner at once consoling and elevated.]

HEAR what God the Lord hath spoken:
"O my people, faint and few;
Comfortless, afflicted, broken,
Fair abodes I build for you:
Thorns of heart-felt tribulation
Shall no more perplex your ways;
You shall name your walls, Salvation,
And your gates shall all be praise.

"There, like streams that feed the garden,
Pleasures without end shall flow;
For the Lord, your faith rewarding,
All his bounty shall bestow:
Still in undisturb'd possession
Peace and righteousness shall reign;
Never shall you feel oppression,
Hear the voice of war again.

"Ye no more your suns descending,
Waning moons, no more shall see;
But, your griefs for ever ending,
Find eternal noon in me:
God shall rise, and, shining o'er you,
Change to day the gloom of night;
He the Lord shall be your glory,
God your everlasting light."

XLV.

[Repentance. Spiritual chastisements ordained for bringing us to God; their efficacy; reception of the repentant offender.]

MY God, till I received thy stroke,
How like a beast was I!
So unaccustom'd to the yoke,
So backward to comply.

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With grief my just reproach I bear,
  Shame fills me at the thought;
How frequent my rebellions were!
  What wickedness I wrought!

Thy merciful restraint I scorn'd,
  And left the pleasant road;
Yet turn me, and I shall be turn'd:
  Thou art the Lord my God.

Is Ephraim banish'd from my thoughts,
  Or vile in my esteem?
No, saith the Lord, with all his faults,
  I still remember him.

Is he a dear and pleasant child?
  Yes, dear and pleasant still;
Though sin his foolish heart beguiled,
  And he withstood my will.

My sharp rebuke has laid him low,
  He seeks my face again;
My pity kindles at his woe,
  He shall not seek in vain.

XLVI.

[Grace freely bestowed; yet not conferred "unsought or unimplored."]

The Lord proclaims his grace abroad:
  "Behold, I change your hearts of stone;
Each shall renounce his idol-god,
  And serve, henceforth, the Lord alone.

"My grace, a flowing stream, proceeds
  To wash your filthiness away;
Ye shall abhor your former deeds,
  And learn my statutes to obey.

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"My truth the great design ensures,
I give myself away to you;
You shall be mine, I will be yours,
Your God unalterably true.

"Yet not unsought or unimplored,
The plenteous grace shall I confer;*
No—your whole heart shall seek the Lord,
I'll put a praying spirit there.

"From the first breath of life divine,
Down to the last expiring hour,
The gracious work shall all be mine,
Begun and ended in my power."

XLVII.

[The heavenly Jerusalem. "Written," (says an eminent poet, his own works not unlike Cowper's in style and feeling,) "with the confidence of inspiration and the authority of a prophet."]

As birds their infant brood protect,†
And spread their wings to shelter them;
Thus saith the Lord to his elect,
"So will I guard Jerusalem."

And what then is Jerusalem,
This darling object of his care?
Where is its worth in God's esteem?
Who built it? who inhabits there?

Jehovah founded it in blood,
The blood of his incarnate Son;
There dwell the saints, once foes to God,
The sinners whom he calls his own.

There, though besieged on every side,
Yet much beloved and guarded well,
From age to age they have defied
The utmost force of earth and hell.

* Ezek. xxxvi. 37. † Isaiah, xxxi. 5.

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Let earth repent, and hell despair,
  This city has a sure defence;
Her name is call'd, "The Lord is there,"
  And who has power to drive him thence?

XLVIII.

[Grace,—its growth and increase. A close and happy imitation of the parable of the Sower.]

Ye sons of earth, prepare the plough,
  Break up your fallow ground;
The sower is gone forth to sow,
  And scatter blessings round.

The seed that finds a stony soil
  Shoots forth a hasty blade;
But ill repays the sower's toil,
  Soon wither'd, scorch'd, and dead.

The thorny ground is sure to baulk
  All hopes of harvest there:
We find a tall and sickly stalk,
  But not the fruitful ear.

The beaten path and highway side
  Receive the trust in vain;
The watchful birds the spoil divide,
  And pick up all the grain.

But where the Lord of grace and power
  Has bless'd the happy field;
How plenteous is the golden store
  The deep-wrought furrows yield!

Father of mercies, we have need
  Of thy preparing grace;
Let the same hand that gives the seed
  Provide a fruitful place.

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XLIX.

[Faith in the Redeemer the one thing needful. Martha and Mary. A beautiful example of scriptural illustration.]

MARTHA her love and joy express'd,
By care to entertain her guest;
While Mary sat to hear her Lord,
And could not bear to lose a word.

The principle, in both the same,
Produced in each a different aim,—
The one to feast the Lord was led,
The other waited to be fed.

But Mary chose the better part,
Her Saviour's words refresh'd her heart;
While busy Martha angry grew,
And lost her time and temper too.

With warmth she to her sister spoke,
But brought upon herself rebuke:
"One thing is needful, and but one,
Why do thy thoughts on many run?"

How oft are we like Martha vex'd,
Encumber'd, hurried, and perplex'd?
While trifles so engross our thought,
The one thing needful is forgot.

Lord, teach us this one thing to choose,
Which they who gain can never lose;
Sufficient in itself alone,
And needful, were the world our own.

Let grovelling hearts the world admire,
Thy love is all that I require!
Gladly I may the rest resign,
If the one needful thing be mine!

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L.

[Religious contentment. Reasons for rejoicing in our lot as those "for whom the Saviour died." Forcible, tender, and affecting.]

FIERCE passions discompose the mind,
As tempests vex the sea;
But calm content and peace we find,
When, Lord, we turn to thee.

In vain by reason and by rule
We try to bend the will;
For none but in the Saviour's school
Can learn the heavenly skill.

Since at his feet my soul has sat,
His gracious words to hear;
Contented with my present state,
I cast on him my care.

"Art thou a sinner, soul?" he said,
"Then how canst thou complain?
How light thy troubles here, if weigh'd
With everlasting pain!

"If thou of murmuring wouldst be cured,
Compare thy griefs with mine;
Think what my love for thee endured,
And thou wilt not repine.

"'Tis I appoint thy daily lot,
And I do all things well;
Thou soon shalt leave this wretched spot,
And rise with me to dwell.

"In life my grace shall strength supply,
Proportion'd to thy day;
At death thou still shalt find me nigh,
To wipe thy tears away."

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Thus I, who once my wretched days
  In vain repinings spent,
Taught in my Saviour's school of grace,
  Have learn'd to be content.

LI.

[The Old Testament ordinances only types of the more perfect institutions of the Gospel.]

ISRAEL, in ancient days,
  Not only had a view
Of Sinai in a blaze,
  But learn'd the gospel too:
The types and figures were a glass
In which they saw a Saviour's face.

The paschal sacrifice,
  And blood-besprinkled door,*
Seen with enlighten'd eyes,
  And once applied with power,
Would teach the need of other blood,
To reconcile an angry God.

The Lamb, the Dove, set forth
  His perfect innocence,†
Whose blood of matchless worth
  Should be the soul's defence;
For he who can for sin atone,
Must have no failings of his own.

The scape-goat on his head‡
  The people's trespass bore,
And to the desert led,
  Was to be seen no more:
In him our Surety seem'd to say,
"Behold! I bear your sins away."

* Exod. xii. 13. † Lev. xii. 6. ‡ Lev. xvi. 21.

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Dipt in his fellow's blood,
  The living bird went free;*
The type, well understood,
  Express'd the sinner's plea;
Described a guilty soul enlarged,
And by a Saviour's death discharged.

Jesus, I love to trace
  Throughout the sacred page,
The footsteps of thy grace,
  The same in every age!
O grant that I may faithful be
To clearer light vouchsafed to me.

LII.

[Decay of piety. Revelation, iii. 1—6.]

"WRITE to Sardis," (saith the Lord,)
  And write what he declares,
He whose Spirit, and whose word,
  Upholds the seven stars:
"All thy works and ways I search,
  Find thy zeal and love decay'd;
Thou art call'd a living church,
  But thou art cold and dead.

"Watch, remember, seek, and strive,
  Exert thy former pains:
Let thy timely care revive,
  And strengthen what remains:
Cleanse thine heart, thy works amend,
  Former times to mind recall,
Lest my sudden stroke descend,
  And smite thee once for all.

"Yet I number now in thee
  A few that are upright;
These my Father's face shall see,
  And walk with me in white:

* Lev. xiv. 51, 52.

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"When in judgment I appear,
They for mine shall be confest,
Let my faithful servants hear,
And wo be to the rest!"

LIII.

[The Lord will provide for the maintenance of his Gospel. Written on the occasion of the death of a minister.]

His master taken from his head,
Elisha saw him go;
And in desponding accents said,
"Ah, what must Israel do?"

But he forgot the Lord who lifts
The beggar to his throne;
Nor knew that all Elijah's gifts
Will soon be made his own.

What, when a Paul has run his course,
Or when Apollos dies,
Is Israel left without resource?
And have we no supplies?

Yes, while the dear Redeemer lives,
We have a boundless store,
And shall be fed with what He gives,
Who lives for evermore.

LIV.

[Vanity of the world; danger of its delusions; yet we are at first pained by being undeceived, until the purifying and real joys of the gospel have been brought home to our hearts. The imagery is remarkable for boldness and novelty, while it still retains a scriptural, united with a highly poetical, character.]

Blinded in youth by Satan's arts,
The world to our unpractised hearts
A flattering prospect shows;
Our fancy forms a thousand schemes
Of gay delights, and golden dreams,
And undisturb'd repose.

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So in the desert's dreary waste,
By magic power produced in haste,
  (As ancient fables say,)
Castles, and groves, and music sweet,
The senses of the traveller meet,
  And stop him in his way.

But while he listens with surprise,
The charm dissolves, the vision dies,
  'Twas but enchanted ground:
Thus if the Lord our spirit touch,
The world, which promised us so much,
  A wilderness is found.

At first we start, and feel distress'd,
Convinced we never can have rest
  In such a wretched place;
But he whose mercy breaks the charm,
Reveals his own Almighty arm,
  And bids us seek his face.

Then we begin to live indeed,
When from our sin and bondage freed
  By this beloved Friend:
We follow him from day to day,
Assured of grace through all the way,
  And glory at the end.

LV.

[Despondency caused by the consciousness of sin. Hope through a gospel repentance. The imitation of Psalm cxxx. in the closing verses, is replete with the noblest and tenderest poetry.]

My former hopes are fled,
  My terror now begins;
I feel, alas! that I am dead
  In trespasses and sins.

Ah! whither shall I fly?
  I hear the thunder roar;
The law proclaims destruction nigh,
  And vengeance at the door.

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When I review my ways,
  I dread impending doom;
But sure a friendly whisper says,
  "Flee from the wrath to come."

I see, or think I see,
  A glimmering from afar;
A beam of day that shines for me,
  To save me from despair.

Forerunner of the sun,*
  It marks the pilgrim's way;
I'll gaze upon it while I run,
  And watch the rising day.

LVI.

[The power of the Cross—the spiritual advantages of affliction—God trieth his own.]

'Tis my happiness below
  Not to live without the cross,
But the Saviour's power to know,
  Sanctifying every loss:
Trials must and will befall;
  But with humble faith to see
Love inscribed upon them all,
  This is happiness to me.

God, in Israel, sows the seeds
  Of affliction, pain, and toil;
These spring up, and choke the weeds
  Which would else o'erspread the soil:
Trials make the promise sweet;
  Trials give new life to prayer;
Trials bring me to his feet,
  Lay me low, and keep me there.

Did I meet no trials here,
  No chastisement by the way;
Might I not with reason fear,
  I should prove a cast-away?

* Psalm cxxx. 6.

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Bastards may escape the rod,*
  Sunk in earthly vain delight;
But the true-born child of God
  Must not, would not, if he might.

LVII.

[Regeneration. This was one of the earliest of these hymns, having been composed before Cowper left St Alban's, and describes that inward change of the affections which he had himself experienced.]

How blest thy creature is, O God,
  When, with a single eye,
He views the lustre of thy word,
  The day-spring from on high!

Through all the storms that veil the skies,
  And frown on earthly things,
The Sun of Righteousness he eyes,
  With healing on his wings.

Struck by that light the human heart,†
  A barren soil no more,
Sends the sweet smell of grace abroad,
  Where serpents lurk'd before.

The soul, a dreary province once
  Of Satan's dark domain,
Feels a new empire form'd within,
  And owns a heavenly reign.

The glorious orb, whose golden beams
  The fruitful year control,
Since first, obedient to thy word,
  He started from the goal,

Has cheer'd the nations with the joys
  His orient rays impart;
But, Jesus, 'tis thy light alone
  Can shine upon the heart.

* Heb. xii. 8. † Isaiah, xxxv. 7.

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LVIII.

[Character, dignity, and happiness of the Christian.]

HONOUR and happiness unite
To make the Christian's name a praise;
How fair the scene, how clear the light,
That fills the remnant of his days!

A kingly character he bears,
No change his priestly office knows;
Unfading is the crown he wears,
His joys can never reach a close.

Adorn'd with glory from on high,
Salvation shines upon his face;
His robe is of the ethereal dye,
His steps are dignity and grace.

Inferior honours he disdains,
Nor stoops to take applause from earth;
The King of kings himself maintains
The expenses of his heavenly birth.

The noblest creature seen below,
Ordain'd to fill a throne above;
God gives him all he can bestow,
His kingdom of eternal love!

My soul is ravish'd at the thought!
Methinks from earth I see him rise!
Angels congratulate his lot,
And shout him welcome to the skies!

LIX.

[Confidence in God the peculiar heritage of the poor—the riches promised to them.]

WHEN Hagar found the bottle spent, *
And wept o'er Ishmael,
A message from the Lord was sent
To guide her to a well.

* Genesis, xxi. 19.

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Should not Elijah's cake and cruise *
  Convince us, at this day,
A gracious God will not refuse
  Provisions by the way?

His saints and servants shall be fed,
  The promise is secure;
"Bread shall be given them," as he said,
  "Their water shall be sure." †

Repasts far richer they shall prove,
  Than all earth's dainties are;
'Tis sweet to taste a Saviour's love,
  Though in the meanest fare.

To Jesus, then, your trouble bring,
  Nor murmur at your lot;
While you are poor, and he is King,
  You shall not be forgot.

LX.

[Turning from dead works to serve the living God. A transcript of Cowper's early experience, and calculated therefore to operate upon the heart as a personal warning.]

SIN enslaved me many years,
  And led me bound and blind;
Till at length a thousand fears
  Came swarming o'er my mind.
Where, I said, in deep distress,
  Will these sinful pleasures end!
How shall I secure my peace,
  And make the Lord my friend?

Friends and ministers said much
  The gospel to enforce;
But my blindness still was such,
  I chose a legal course:
Much I fasted, watch'd, and strove,
  Scarce would shew my face abroad,
Fear'd almost to speak or move,
  A stranger still to God.

* 2 Kings, xvii. 14. † Isaiah, xxxiii. 16.

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Thus afraid to trust his grace,
  Long time did I rebel;
Till, despairing of my case,
  Down at his feet I fell:
Then my stubborn heart he broke,
  And subdued me to his sway;
By a simple word he spoke,
  "Thy sins are done away."

LXI.

[The hateful dominion of sin—the delights of spiritual freedom and purity as secured by a saving belief in Jesus.]

Holy Lord God! I love thy truth,
  Nor dare thy least commandment slight;
Yet pierced by sin, the serpent's tooth,
  I mourn the anguish of the bite.

But though the poison lurks within,
  Hope bids me still with patience wait,
Till death shall set me free from sin,
  Free from the only thing I hate.

Had I a throne above the rest,
  Where angels and archangels dwell;
One sin, unslain, within my breast,
  Would make that heaven as dark as hell.

The prisoner, sent to breathe fresh air,
  And bless'd with liberty again,
Would mourn were he condemn'd to wear
  One link of all his former chain.

But oh! no foe invades the bliss,
  When glory crowns the Christian's head;
One view of Jesus as he is,
  Will strike all sin for ever dead.

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LXII.

[Conversion through grace. We are saved, and that not of ourselves.]

THE new-born child of gospel grace,
Like some fair tree when summer's nigh,
Beneath Emmanuel's shining face,
Lifts up his blooming branch on high.

No fears he feels, he sees no foes,
No conflict yet his faith employs,
Nor has he learnt to whom he owes
The strength and peace his soul enjoys.

But sin soon darts its cruel sting,
And comforts sinking day by day;
What seem'd his own, a self-fed spring,
Proves but a brook that glides away.

When Gideon arm'd his numerous host,
The Lord soon made his numbers less;
And said, "Lest Israel vainly boast,*
My arm procured me this success."

Thus will he bring our spirits down,
And draw our ebbing comforts low,
That saved by grace, but not our own,
We may not claim the praise we owe.

LXIII.

[True faith in its own deep quietness is content. The loud professor often but a tinkling cymbal. The whole is doctrinal and beautiful; but we dislike both the sentiment and the witticism in the fourth verse.]

THE Lord receives his highest praise
From humble minds and hearts sincere;
While all the loud professor says
Offends the righteous Judge's ear.

* Judges, vii. 2.

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To talk as children of the day,
  To mark the precept's holy light,
To wage the warfare, watch, and pray,
  Shew who are pleasing in his sight.

Not words alone it cost the Lord,
  To purchase pardon for his own;
Nor will a soul, by grace restored,
  Return the Saviour words alone.

With golden bells, the priestly vest,*
  And rich pomegranates border'd round,
The need of holiness express'd,
  And call'd for fruit as well as sound.

Easy, indeed, it were to reach
  A mansion in the courts above,
If swelling words and fluent speech
  Might serve instead of faith and love.

But none shall gain the blissful place,
  Or God's unclouded glory see,
Who talks of free and sovereign grace,
  Unless that grace has made him free!

LXIV.

[Not all those who cry Lord, Lord, are true believers—the called many, but the chosen few.]

Too many, Lord, abuse thy grace,
  In this licentious day;
And while they boast they see thy face,
  They turn their own away.

Thy book displays a gracious light,
  That can the blind restore;
But these are dazzled by the sight,
  And blinded still the more.

* Exod. xxviii. 33.

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The pardon such presume upon,
They do not beg, but steal;
And when they plead it at thy throne,
Oh! where's the Spirit's seal?

Was it for this, ye lawless tribe,
The dear Redeemer bled?
Is this the grace the saints imbibe
From Christ the living Head?

Ah, Lord, ye know thy chosen few
Are fed with heavenly fare;
But these, the wretched husks they chew,
Proclaim them what they are.

The liberty our hearts implore,
Is not to live in sin;
But still to wait at Wisdom's door,
Till Mercy calls us in.

LXV.

[Narrow is the way that leadeth unto life—vain pursuit of the world.]

WHAT thousands never knew the road!
What thousands hate it when 'tis known!
None but the chosen tribes of God
Will seek or choose it for their own.

A thousand ways in ruin end,
One only leads to joys on high;
By that my willing steps ascend,
Pleased with a journey to the sky.

No more I ask or hope to find
Delight or happiness below;
Sorrow may well possess the mind
That feeds where thorns and thistles grow.

The joy that fades is not for me,
I seek immortal joys above;
There glory without end shall be,
The bright reward of faith and love.

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Cleave to the world, ye sordid worms,
Contented lick your native dust;
But God shall fight, with all his storms,
Against the idol of your trust.

LXVI.

[Man's dependence is upon God alone—we are saved by grace through Jesus Christ.]

To keep the lamp alive,
With oil we fill the bowl;
'Tis water makes the willow thrive,
And grace that feeds the soul.

The Lord's unsparing hand
Supplies the living stream;
It is not at our own command,
But still derived from him.

Beware of Peter's word,*
Nor confidently say,
"I never *will* deny thee, Lord,"
But, grant I never may.

Man's wisdom is to seek
His strength in God alone;
And e'en an angel would be weak,
Who trusted in his own.

Retreat beneath his wings,
And in his grace confide;
This more exalts the King of kings,†
Than all your works beside.

In Jesus is our store,
Grace issues from his throne;
Whoever says, "I want no more,"
Confesses he has none.

* Matt. xxvi. 33. † John, vi. 29.

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LXVII.

[By the works of the law shall no flesh living be justified. Self advancement an idolatry—a robbing of Christ.]

GRACE, triumphant in the throne,
Scorns a rival, reigns alone.
Come, and bow beneath her sway,
Cast your idol-works away.
Works of man, when made his plea,
Never shall accepted be;
Fruits of pride (vain-glorious worm!)
Are the best he can perform.

Self, the god his soul adores,
Influences all his powers;
Jesus is a slighted name,
Self-advancement all his aim:
But when God the Judge shall come,
To pronounce the final doom,
Then for rocks and hills to hide
All his works and all his pride!

Still the boasting heart replies,
What! the worthy and the wise,
Friends to temperance and peace,
Have not these a righteousness?
Banish every vain pretence
Built on human excellence;
Perish every thing in man,
But the grace that never can.

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LXVIII.

[God's providence mysterious, but ever merciful. Our own unbelief only can deprive us of this comfortable assurance. This is the last hymn composed by Cowper; his spirit had been darkening daily, till late in the autumn of 1772, when during one of his latest walks he composed these noble verses. The face of that nature which he loved, and of the Creator whom he thus praised, were to be hid from his sight for many years.]

God moves in a mysterious way
  His wonders to perform;
He plants his footsteps in the sea,
  And rides upon the storm.

Deep in unfathomable mines
  Of never-failing skill,
He treasures up his bright designs,
  And works his sovereign will.

Ye fearful saints, fresh courage take,
  The clouds ye so much dread
Are big with mercy, and shall break
  In blessings on your head.

Judge not the Lord by feeble sense,
  But trust him for his grace:
Behind a frowning providence
  He hides a smiling face.

His purposes will ripen fast,
  Unfolding every hour;
The bud may have a bitter taste,
  But sweet will be the flower.

Blind unbelief is sure to err,*
  And scan his work in vain:
God is his own interpreter,
  And he will make it plain.

* John, xiii. 7.

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NOTES TO TABLE TALK.

NOTE 1.—Page 1, line 6.

The laurel the very lightning spares.

Naturalists describe and class upwards of forty different species of laurel; but in all the quality of being a preservative against lightning, exists as a poetical attribute only. Both antiquity, however, and poetry have hallowed a superstition which probably derived its birth from the purposes to which the latter dedicated the shrub: there the belief is no fiction,

> For the true laurel wreath which glory weaves,
> Is of the tree no bolt of thunder cleaves!
>
> BYRON.

NOTE 2.—Page 1, line 13.

Laurels, drench'd in pure Parnassian dews.

The whole of this spirited paragraph was an afterthought, added while the manuscript lay with the printer, but before it had been put to press. In the third line of the author's copy, as transmitted in a letter to Newton, the expression is *the noblest*, instead of *unshaken* in the printed poem. In his original writings, when once finished, few writers appear to have altered less than Cowper. "Touching and retouching," he indeed confesses "to be his secret of writing well;" but it was during the progress of composition only that he thus laboured; a poem fairly transcribed was dismissed from his mind. Hence we are able to trace a very small number of emendations in his proof sheets, and hardly any difference between his own editions of his works. The few corrections, however, or alterations, now to be ascertained evince consummate taste; while the additions, as in the present instance, are always such as the world would regret to have lost.

NOTE 3.—Page 2, line 4 from bottom.

Oh! bright occasions of dispensing good.

This beautiful passage was written as descriptive of the character of George III. However some readers may differ in their estimate of its truth as applicable to the princely qualities of that monarch, few will doubt that it is a just tribute to the household virtues of the man.

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NOTE 4.—Page 3, line 27.

Quevedo, as he tells his sober tale.

"The tale from Quevedo," says Hayley, "I have frequently heard recited by a judge of the most delicate discernment, as a very striking example of Cowper's talent for lively narration." Quevedo, a Spanish poet and miscellaneous writer, was born in 1580, at Madrid, where he died, aged sixty-five. The "Visions of Hell," whence the scene in the text is taken, and the "Comic Tales," the most esteemed of his writings, have been both translated into English.

NOTE 5.—Page 5, line 5.

To be the table talk of clubs up stairs.

In London, whence all Cowper's ideas of public life are taken, and to which alone almost all his notions of political events have reference, the ground floor even in the meanest streets is applied to the grand purpose of traffic,—hence "clubs up stairs."

NOTE 6.—Page 5, line 6 from bottom.

Not Brindley nor Bridgewater would essay.

There is much quaint and humorous propriety in the selection of these names "to turn the course of Helicon." Brindley, a self-taught engineer, who was born in 1716, and died in 1772, is well known as the original constructor of several of the principal canals in England, and of the famous aqueduct over the Irwell. He used to say, that nature made rivers only as feeders to canals. His great patron in these undertakings was the Duke of Bridgewater.

NOTE 7.—Page 6, line 12 from bottom.

Thus with a rigour, for his good design'd.

"The modest author himself has confessed to me his own partiality to the verses in Table Talk which describe the character of a Briton."

HAYLEY.

NOTE 8.—Page 7, line 7.

Born in a climate softer far than ours.

This description now applies neither to the survivor of the republic or the empire, nor to the Frenchman under a citizen king. What an awful ordeal has France passed through during the fifty years since the first publication of these verses! Yet from alternations of licence and despotism—of glory and abasement—of misery and exultation—of reckless despair and noble exertion, unparalleled in the history of nations,—what has she gained? Nothing. Her people have become less gay without being more serious; her rulers not less absolute, but more oppressive; and her government, though more democratic, is not so liberal. The last explains the former inconsistencies. France has sacrificed to the idol Equality, the blood, the treasure, and the toil which should have been consecrated at the shrine of Liberty. Her fate reads a lesson to every country that would extend legislative powers to the many.

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NOTE 9.—Page 9, line 11.

When Tumult lately burst his prison door.

These lines allude to the riots of the Protestant association, instigated by Lord George Gordon in the winter of 1780, by which the metropolis was threatened with destruction:

And blazing London seem'd a second Troy.

NOTE 10.—Page 9, line 7 from bottom.

Though the chief actor died upon the stage.

William Pitt, Earl of Chatham, born on the 15th November, 1708, fainted in the House of Peers 7th April, 1778, while in the act of speaking to persuade the Lords to vote against the Duke of Richmond's motion for recognizing the independence of the American colonies. From this shock he never recovered, but expired on the 11th of May following; thus it may with justice be said that he "died upon the stage." "Were these to be my last words," he exclaimed, "I would lift up my voice against the dismemberment of this ancient and most noble monarchy." They were his last words—and uttered in vain! Demosthenes is here introduced with great propriety, since Chatham formed himself upon the model, and more than once transcribed with his own hands the favourite orations of the Athenian.

NOTE 11.—Page 10, line 13.

So Gideon earn'd a victory not his own.

Cowper excells all modern poets, Milton hardly excepted, in the propriety and beauty of his scriptural illustrations. It must, however, be confessed that this, the first example which occurs in his works, is neither happily imagined nor well applied. It is true, the most exalted of mortal agents is nothing more than a humble instrument of the divine will. But between the sufficiency of means and the consciousness of free agency permitted to man in the ordinary workings of Providence, and the prescribed and miraculous employment of Gideon, with contrivance so inadequate, so evidently beyond the course of nature, there can be no analogy in reason, in religion, or in poetry.

NOTE 12.—Page 10, line 15.

Poor England! thou art a devoted deer.

This alludes to the armed neutrality of the European powers formed in the autumn of 1780, by which they engaged to assist each other in resisting the right of searching neutral vessels claimed by Great Britain. The author, speaking of this very passage, has the following remark in one of his private letters. "As to the neutralities, I really think the Russian virago an impertinent puss for meddling with us, and engaging half a score of kittens of her acquaintance to scratch the poor old Lion, who, if he has been insolent in his day, has probably acted no otherwise than they themselves would have acted in his circumstances, and with his power to imbolden them."—March 5, 1781.

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Note 13. — Page 10, line 2 from bottom.

The inestimable Estimate of Brown.

John Brown, D.D. of Cambridge, born in Northumberland 1715, committed suicide 1766, was a writer of multifarious talents, whose numerous productions, both in prose and verse, once enjoyed great popularity. The work referred to in the text, "An Estimate of the Manners and Principles of the Times," published in 1757, passed through seven editions in the same year. It represents Britain as then sunk in utter degeneracy, and predicts her speedy ruin as a nation.

But victory refuted all he said;

namely, Wolfe's, Boscawen's, Hawke's, Clive's, the battle of Minden, &c. and the general prosperity which, in 1760, ushered in the accession of George III.

Note 14. — Page 12, line 13.

Not only vice disposes and prepares.

"The poet, by an easy pedestrian pace, has got midway through his theme before he kindles into any thing like fury, or betrays any strong symptom of the diviner mood. Then, indeed, comes a glorious burst, in which the patriot, the Christian, and the bard, all unite in a warning sufficient to alarm the most supine statesman, touching the real perils and false security of a nation hastening unconsciously to ruin, through the undermining vices of luxury and licentiousness." — Montgomery.

Note 15. — Page 18, line 7.

Churchill; himself unconscious of his powers.

It has been justly remarked, that this spirited passage is an excellent imitation of the style of the bold satirist whose character it portrays. Nothing, however, save the blind partiality with which even the best of men are apt to regard early friendships, could have induced the virtuous Cowper to speak so leniently of the vices of Churchill, — one who not only disgraced the sacred function, but who, by the vulgarity of his profligacy, would have brought contempt upon the veriest man of the world. He was the schoolfellow of Cowper, and about the same age. He died in France, 1764, at the age of thirty-three, leaving his career recorded in an epitaph composed by himself:

Life to the last enjoy'd, here Churchill lies.

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NOTES TO THE PROGRESS OF ERROR.

Note 1.—Page 23, line 7.

The poisonous, black, insinuating worm.

The expression, "worm," in this and other passages, which has incurred the disapprobation of some living critics, appears to have also been objected to by Cowper's friends, to whom the manuscript was submitted. He defended its application, and retained the word, on the authority of Milton, as in the passage,—

> The chains of darkness, and the undying *worm*.

He might have added Shakespeare:

> ————The mortal *worm*,
> The *worm* of conscience, still begnaw thy soul!

And the stern sublimity of Scripture, "where the *worm* dieth not."

Note 2.—Page 25, line 25.

Unmiss'd but by his dogs, and by his groom.

Cowper, in several passages, displays not only a contempt, but a detestation of field sports. In his youth, however, he appears to have viewed such amusements with more leniency, though it is evident that his *practice* then, as a sportsman, could hardly be turned against his *theory* in after life as a poet. In some verses written in his twenty-second year, we find the following among other "Symptoms of Love," for such is the title of the piece.

> Would my Delia know if I love, let her take
> My last thought at night, and the first when I wake;
> With my prayers and best wishes preferr'd for her sake:
> Let her guess what I muse on, when, rambling alone,
> I stride o'er the stubble each day with my gun,
> Never ready to shoot till the covey is flown.

Note 3.—Page 26, line 15.

Occiduus is a pastor of renown.

"The character of Occiduus," observes Mr Campbell, in his *Selections from the British Poets*, "is almost the sole exception to the general freedom from personality, which honourably distinguishes Cowper's satire." The remark is just; but it is worth inquiring into the cause of this exception, were it only to shew that Cowper was not personal, except when he considered reprehension to be individually merited. Occiduus is a kind of Latin anagram upon the name Wesley, in whose house, and under whose sanction, and even direction, these *Sunday evening* musical parties were held. While the present poem was passing through the press, Cowper, in reference to this passage, writes thus to Newton: "I am sorry to find that the censure I have passed upon Occiduus is even better founded than I supposed. Lady

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Austen has been at his Sabbatical concerts, which, it seems, are composed of *song tunes* and psalm tunes indiscriminately; music without words, and, I suppose one may say, consequently without devotion. On a certain occasion, when her niece was sitting at her side, she asked his opinion concerning the lawfulness of such amusements as are to be found at Vauxhall or Ranelagh; meaning only to draw from him a sentence of disapprobation, that Miss Green (the daughter, by a first marriage, of Mrs Jones, Lady Austen's sister) might be the better reconciled to the restraint under which she was held, when she found it warranted by the judgment of so sound a divine. But she was disappointed; he accounted them innocent, and recommended them as useful. 'Curiosity,' he said, 'was natural to young persons; and it was wrong to deny them a gratification which they might be indulged in with the greatest safety; because the denial being unreasonable, the desire of it would still subsist. It was but a walk, and a walk was as harmless in one place as in another!'—with other arguments of a similar import, which might have proceeded with more grace, at least with less offence, from the lips of a sensual layman. He seems, together with others of our acquaintance, to have suffered considerably in his spiritual character by his attachment to music."—September 8, 1781. From the remaining part of the letter, Cowper shews that he means attachment to music carried to an excess; and we do hope that, generally at least, it is thought that concerts on a Sunday evening are a most reprehensible excess.

Wesley was born at Epworth in 1703, studied at Christ Church College, Oxford. While here a few of his fellow students of like serious habits joined with him in forming a society for religious conversation, to which the term Methodists was applied by their gayer companions. Hence the origin of the sect which now constitutes so important a division of the Christian church. Wesley died 1791, having, according to some computations, preached 40,000 sermons, and travelled a space equal to fifteen times the circumference of the globe!

Note 4.—Page 31, line 25.

Petronius! all the Muses weep for thee.

Under this name, that of a Roman poet who prostituted an elegant fancy to the service of licentiousness, Cowper lanches a severe but just reproof against Lord Chesterfield. That noblemen had been dead about eight years at the time these lines were written; then his political reputation and literary fame ranked higher than they do now, consequently the contagion of his letters was the more dreaded by those who regarded with Christian solicitude their probable effect upon the future generations of British youth.

Note 5.—Page 32, line 12.

And without discipline the favourite child,
Like a neglected forester, runs wild.

The editor must object to his author's doctrine here. It is not the child that requires the rod; if properly trained, he will neither stand in need, nor even understand the necessity of punishment: because the rod is used or threatened improperly to the *child*, it is that the *boy*

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becomes unmanageable without it; but to begin education rightly, and from the beginning, appears unfortunately to be a task to the *delicate observation* and *ceaseless duty* of which few parents are inclined to submit.

NOTE 6.—Page 32, line 23.

With memorandum-book for every town,
And every post, and where the chaise broke down.

We are informed, in one of Cowper's private letters, of a rather curious emendation, which was requisite in this passage as originally written. "In the Progress of Error, a part of the young squire's apparatus, before he yet enters upon his travels, is said to be—

Memorandum-book, to minute down
The several posts, and where the chaise broke down.

Here, the reviewers would say, is not only 'down,' but 'down, derry down,' into the bargain, the word being made to rhyme to itself. This never occurred to me till last night, just as I was stepping into bed. I should be glad, however, to alter it thus." Then follow the lines as now printed.—*Cowper to Newton*, July 7, 1781.

NOTE 7.—Page 35, line 16.

Even Lewenhoeck himself would stand aghast.

A self-taught philosopher, born at Delft 1632, where he died after a life of ninety years, devoted chiefly to observations with the microscope; of which instrument he may almost be termed the inventor. His works are published in four quarto volumes, consisting of exceedingly curious experiments and descriptions of his discoveries.

NOTE 8.—Page 36, line 18.

Woo'd an unfeeling statue for his wife,
Nor rested till the gods had given it life.

Pygmalion, whose age forms an important era in the history of ancient art, though more lightly applied in the text. See *Ovid* for the fable, and *Arnobius*, lib. vi. for the history; but both have omitted the pleasing connection which by such traditions the Greeks endeavoured to establish between the origin of the arts and the human affections.

NOTE 9.—Page 36, line 27.

Such was Sir Isaac, and such Boyle and Locke.

Newton, the great master of experimental philosophy, was born in 1642, and died, aged eighty-five, in 1727, exactly a century after the decease of Bacon, its founder. Of the truth, however, of the poet's previous remark,

Our most important are our earliest years,

Newton furnishes a striking proof, since his three immortal discoveries —Fluxions, the Theory of Light, and the System of Gravitation—

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were made before he was thirty. But again, Bacon's *Novum Organon* was not completed till its author had reached his sixty-first year.

For fame that 's true, life is a light exchange.

Boyle was born 1626, three months after Lord Bacon's death, thus filling up, by a most useful and early devotion of his life to study, the gap between the latter and Newton. Locke, born 1632, and dying 1704, directed into another channel the stream of knowledge, doing for the world of mind what these illustrious contemporaries were effecting for that of matter. In remarking upon a poet whose every aim points to religion, it is delightful thus to contemplate, in the very instances which he brings from the history of human knowledge, the care of God, who no sooner called away one servant, than he seemed to place that torch of true wisdom which a dying hand had relinquished in a young and vigorous grasp created for its reception.

NOTES TO TRUTH.

NOTE 1.—Page 41, line 10.

He reads his sentence at the flames of hell.

"I am no friend," writes the author in his *Private Correspondence*, "to the use of words taken from what an uncle of mine called the *Diabolical Dictionary*, but it happens sometimes that a strong expression is almost necessary to do justice to the indignation excited by an abominable subject." Cowper could not but deem sin a subject of this nature, and he has marked his own detestation, and its dangers, by the most fearful line in the whole compass of English poetry.

NOTE 2.—Page 41, line 20.

Your wilful suicide on God's decree.

Milton's view of this doctrine is similar:

So without least impulse or shadow of fate,
Or ought by me immutably foreseen,
They trespass; authors to themselves in all,
Both what they judge and what they choose.
Paradise Lost, Book III.

The admirers of both poets will find it an occupation barren neither of Christian edification, nor literary improvement, to compare frequently the religious views of Milton and Cowper. It would, however, be unpardonable intrusion in these notes, to quote even a portion of the numerous passages in which the latter resembles the former so closely, as almost to approach imitation. Upon the same principle, all references to other poets are omitted. We are persuaded also, with Cowper himself, that the majority of instances which have been adduced, of intentional borrowing, are merely the effects of accidental coincidence. Besides, we have his solemn assurance, and the fact is a very singular one, that he had read the works of but one poet, for twenty years previously. "I reckon it" (says he in a letter dated November, 1781,) "among my principal

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advantages as a composer of verses, that I have not read an English poet these thirteen years, and but one these twenty years. Imitation even of the best models is my aversion; it is servile and mechanical, a trick that has enabled many to usurp the name of author, who could not have written at all, if they had not written upon the pattern of somebody indeed original. But when the ear and the taste have been much accustomed to the manner of others, it is almost impossible to avoid it; and we imitate, in spite of ourselves, just in proportion as we admire." After this confession, though it by no means surprises to find—where the subject is not far beyond such learning—a perfect familiarity with the classics, especially the Latin authors, in the compositions of Cowper, yet his present and intimate knowledge of those English poets with whose works he could not thus have been conversant since manhood, and hardly before, has been matter of admiration. An extract from one of Lady Hesketh's letters, which we have lately met with, appears to offer some explanation. "My account of Mrs Unwin may seem perhaps to you contradictory; but her character developes itself by degrees, and though I might have led you to suppose her grave and melancholy, she is not so by any means. When she speaks upon grave subjects, she does express herself with a puritanical tone, and in puritanical expressions; but on all other subjects she seems to have a great disposition to cheerfulness and mirth. I must say, too, that she seems to be very well read in the English poets, as appears by several little quotations, which she makes from time to time, and has a true taste for what is excellent in that way." Cowper would thus be brought insensibly to renew the impressions of his earlier studies, and without the disadvantages, which he dreaded, of overlaying fancy, derive all the benefits which he himself so well describes, when he says, "he who would write, should read, not that he may retail the observations of other men, but that being thus refreshed and replenished, he may find himself in a condition to make and to produce his own."

NOTE 3.—Page 41, last line.

The soul-quickening words—Believe and live.

Cowper kindles into poetry when only a stray thought of religion mingles its influence with even the lowliest subject. In proportion, then, as divine themes became the habitual language of his muse, that language assumes more and more of nobleness and beauty. Both the words and imagery in this passage are a proof of this, and their pleasing grandeur strikes with greater force, as a contrast to the gloomy sternness of Dante's and Milton's inscription over the "infernal doors."

NOTE 4.—Page 43, line 18.

Wearing out life in his religious whim,
Till his religious whimsy wears out him.

These lines, by their peculiar turn and play upon the words, are happily characteristic of the contempt, mixed with ridicule, by which it is the author's object to bring into disrepute all such hollow substitutions for practical sanctity.

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Note 5.—Page 44, line 12.

Abstinence, and beggary, and lice.

Cowper, in his Letters, avows a disregard of merely poetical refinements in language, and a resolution to employ *all* words which may strongly represent his own meaning. Hence, a very ordinary tone is often given to his verses, even on topics of deep interest; rarely, however, save when indignantly satirical, are his expressions coarse. In this preference of vigour he appears to have followed his ancestor Donne, whose famous line,

> The grave—dust without, and stink within,

affords an example of the nature and superiority of Cowper's practice. In Donne's line, the satire on human pride is so offensive, that instead of improving it disgusts us. Our associations with the grave, exist less in personal feeling, than in sympathies which belong to our most revered affections, our most sacred hopes. But Cowper, as a satirist, evinces consummate knowledge of the human heart; be his admonitions, remonstrances, or sarcasms ever so stern, indignant, or biting, they never glance from their legitimate objects—follies and vices; they never wound where they cannot correct.

Note 6.—Page 47, line 8.

Blown all aslant, a driving, dashing rain.

In the description of natural scenery, our author very seldom, perhaps never, rises to the sublime. Indeed, with the grand features of creation, the lofty mountain, or dark forest, or wide extended main, he had been but little conversant. Of Nature, however, in her quieter moods and ordinary appearances, he was not only a diligent observer, but he looked upon her with that rare intelligence, granted only to the highest order of genius in the imitative arts, which seizes at once the character and the details, thus reproducing what is great without confusion, and what is minute without feebleness. Hence is the descriptive poetry of Cowper pre-eminently animated with a graphic power, which now delights by variety of elaborate finish, now strikes by a bold reality compressing a whole description into a single epithet. The Task chiefly abounds in examples of the former, these earlier poems of the latter excellence. In this respect, the two lines in the text,

> See where it *smokes* along the *sounding* plain,
> *Blown* all *aslant*, a *driving*, *dashing* rain,

may be advantageously compared with any couplet in the whole compass of descriptive poetry. It must, however, be confessed, that the entire simile is feeble, incapable of sustaining the awful truth that follows. The escape of a traveller from the anger of the "impotent elements," brought to illustrate the salvation of a soul from "infinite wrath," leaves the imagination vainly labouring to discover a resemblance.

Note 7.—Page 48, line 9.

Hence a demeanour holy and unspeck'd.

"Unspeck'd" is one of the very few instances, perhaps the only one, in which Cowper has employed a word on his own authority. He is indeed a great master of genuine English; but though he often makes

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very bold attempts, hazardous they would be in other hands, to render common, or even mean expressions poetical, his works have extended the limits of the language of poetry by novel applications, rather than augmented the number of its vocables by new inventions. This is the true method of writing well, which it were to be wished his successors had imitated.

NOTE 8. — Page 48, line 3 from bottom.

Oh — then a text would touch him at the quick.

Marie Francis Arouet de Voltaire, born February 20, 1694, was educated in the Jesuits' College at Paris, in which capital he also died on the 30th of May, 1778. Voltaire's life was more chequered than the lives of literary men usually are. He was twice incarcerated as a state prisoner in the Bastile before he was thirty, and in both instances, we believe, unjustly. During his first imprisonment he formed the plan of the Henriade; during the interval of liberty he published three tragedies; and after his second captivity, resided three years in England. On his return, work followed work from his pen with wonderful rapidity; he became an academician, a courtier, and historiographer of France. At the age of fifty-six he accepted the invitation and friendship of Frederic the Great; but after three years residence, quarrelled with his royal friend, and on quitting the Prussian dominions, Paris being interdicted to him, purchased the estate of Ferney, near Geneva, where, for thirty years, he gave himself wholly to literature. The fruits of all these labours in the best edition (that of Beaumarchais's) occupy seventy volumes octavo. But Voltaire is not only one of the most copious, he is likewise one of the most excellent writers of modern times. "There is not," observes La Harpe, "in the literature of any country, either in verse or prose, an author who has written on so many opposite kinds of subjects, and has so constantly displayed a superiority in all of them." This is true; but, unfortunately, the strictures of our text are also true, and Voltaire fulfilled the prediction of one of his tutors, and became the Coryphæus of deism in France. The scenes alluded to in these verses took place during Voltaire's last visit to Paris, after an absence of twenty-nine years, when his bust was crowned on the stage, and placed by the French academicians next to that of Corneille. But it is not true that Voltaire, "an infidel in health," was touched by a text when sick. There are three men, famous by "the bad eminence" of deism — Voltaire, Rousseau, and David Hume — whom the well-meaning, with very mistaken notions about the honour of religion, represent as expiring in agonies of awakened conviction. Not so. The first died of an over-dose of laudanum, consequently in a stupor; the second expired while gazing upon the sinking sun with that love of Nature, which was the only unaffected sentiment he retained to the last; while Hume departed, like Socrates, almost in the midst of philosophical conversation. What then? Do these instances reflect on the power of Christianity over the conscience? By no means. The heart of the *stubborn* unbeliever is hardened, so that it may not be "touched" by the Gospel to conversion and saving faith. The dying impenitence of men such as these, accomplished possessors of a perishable learning, is, in fact, a proof of the veracity of that knowledge which is from above.

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NOTE 9.—Page 50, line 6.

Because ye will not, Conyers would reply.

The Rev. Dr Conyers of York, a friend of Mr Unwin, junior, and who first introduced Mr Newton to Mrs Unwin and Cowper, while they resided in Huntingdon.

NOTE 10.—Page 50, line 12.

As leanest land supplies the richest wine.

This is not quite correct. The poet seems to have considered high flavoured as synonymous with rich wine.

NOTE 11.—Page 50, line 27.

Like gleanings of an olive-tree they show.

English poets rarely succeed in describing foreign imagery, though they excel all others in delineations of native scenes. On this point Cowper well remarks,—"Thomson is admirable in description; but I could wish, with Dr Johnson, that he had confined himself to this country: for when he describes what he never saw, one is forced to read him with some allowance." One might happily apply these his own words to our author, with this difference, that he rarely, and only for brief illustration, deviates into distant landscape. The simile before us shews his wisdom in this: it is beautifully said of an English fruit tree; but of an olive, with small clustering berries growing sessile along the branches, it affords no consistent idea.

NOTE 12.—Page 52, line 18.

Such lunacy is ignorance alone.

Nothing can corroborate more strongly the view which has been taken of the religion and misfortunes of Cowper in the Life prefixed to the present edition of his works than these lines. In the Memoir it is shewn that his insanity first sprung from his unbelief, and that he was restored through the grace of believing. He himself here testifies deliberately to the same truths. Who then shall accuse us of having harshly judged him? His misfortunes, so far as they appeared to be visitations of Heaven, have our deepest sympathy; but with the madness of unbelief—or wilful ignorance rather, with that recklessness of God's empire which would prompt the suicide to dare divine justice and eternal wrath, rather than calmly suffer and meekly learn, there can be maintained, even in the case of Cowper, no measures of conciliation.

NOTE 13.—Page 54, line 2.

Of all that wisdom dictates, this the drift,—
That man is dead in sin, and life a gift.

The Christian reader will not here misinterpret the strong example which the poet has selected. Grace cannot come to the unworthy, because no unworthy person can have saving faith, neither will it be vouchsafed to the merely *morally* pure rejecter of the gospel scheme. The meaning of the text, therefore, is, that the penitent sinner who seeks it as a gift, shall find the grace which is denied to the self-righteous, who asks it not wholly and only through the merits of the Redeemer.

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NOTES TO EXPOSTULATION.

NOTE 1.—Page 60, line 2.

—— What appears
In England's case to move the muse to tears?

The reader will observe, that Cowper's ideas of England are drawn here exclusively from his recollections of London. Of English life and manners in the country, he could have acquired but limited experience in his early years; and this slender acquaintance had not been increased by subsequent opportunities of observation.

NOTE 2.—Page 60, line 6 from bottom.

Wept, and stamp'd, and smote his thigh in vain.

The editor remembers to have heard Talma remark, in reference to this particular action, that it long seemed to him a most unnatural gesture of grief, until having witnessed a very distressing scene of shipwreck on the coast of Brittany, he observed that the distracted relatives on shore of those perishing at sea, "smote upon their thighs" incessantly as they ran wildly about the beach.

NOTE 3.—Page 61, line 5 from bottom.

Catch from each other a contagious spot,
The foul forerunner of a general rot.

"Analyze this. A hireling shepherd is appointed to watch a fountain—he falls asleep on the brink—an enemy of his master comes, and poisons the stream—the flocks drink of it, are infected, and perish miserably. There is even an underplot in which he himself acts the traitor, and taints the current with his own infusions."—J. MONTGOMERY.

NOTE 4.—Page 65, line 2.

Might give more life to marble, or might fill
The glowing tablets with a juster skill.

Christianity—whose perfect love casteth out fear, which expands the charities and sanctifies the affections of the heart—refines also, and has multiplied its sympathies with the beautiful, the grand, and the pure in nature and taste. But the stern appointments of the Mosaic dispensation permitted no exercise to sensibilities, which, when unenlightened, as sad experience proves, are but too apt to lead astray. Hence, among the Jews, the fine arts never flourished. Sculpture existed only in a few prescribed ornaments for sacred purposes; painting was unknown as an art; and even the architecture of the temple was executed by foreign hands.

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NOTE 5.—Page 65, line 29.

Thy temple, once thy glory, fallen and razed.

The fate of their Temple is one of the most striking evidences in the external history of the Jews. Over the face of the whole earth are traced, as it were, the very footsteps of false religion. The circle of unchiselled stone half sunk in the heath—the art where grandeur astonishes, or symmetry charms the eye, whether left to unhastened decay, or exposed to the rage of man, still impress their sites with imperishable records: but of the temple of the Most High, reared in proportions, and with materials equally stupendous, not a wreck remains; for He had declared that not one stone should be left upon another. While human error thus survives in the monuments of its own waywardness and ingratitude, Jehovah declares his power by an awful blank. Lest, however, this dread evidence might be gainsaid, the very arts of the conqueror speak to the passing generations of Jerusalem and her Zion; and the sculptures in the arch of Titus testify to the institutions of Moses.

NOTE 6.—Page 66, line 12.

A lawless brood, and curse thee to thy face.

From its commencement, Cowper viewed the American contest with dread, and, overlooking the political predilections of the party to which he professed to belong, with that just indignation that ingratitude always rouses in an honest heart. There is much truth and good sense in the following remarks:—"I know not whether your sentiments and mine upon this part of the subject exactly agree, but you will know, when you understand what mine are. It appears to me that the king is bound, both by the duty he owes to himself and to his people, to consider himself with respect to every inch of his territories, as a trustee deriving his interest in them from God, and invested with them by divine authority for the benefit of his subjects. As he may not sell them or waste them, so he may not resign them to an enemy, or transfer his right to govern them to any, not even to themselves, so long as it is possible for him to keep it. If he does, he betrays at once his own interest, and that of his other dominions. It may be said, suppose Providence has ordained that they shall be wrested from him, how then? I answer, that cannot appear to be the case, till God's purpose is actually accomplished; and in the meantime, the most probable prospect of such an event does not release him from his obligation to hold them to the last moment, for as much as adverse appearances are no infallible indication of God's designs, but may give place to more comfortable symptoms, when we least expect it. Viewing the thing in this light, if I sat on his majesty's throne, I should be as obstinate as he, because if I quitted the contest, while I had any means left of carrying it on, I should never know that I had not relinquished what I might have retained, or be able to render a satisfactory answer to the doubts and inquiries of my own conscience."—*Cowper's Private Correspondence, January* 13, 1782.

NOTE 7.—Page 66, line 22.

Return ashamed, without the wreaths they sought.

This refers to various naval engagements, as Rodney's with the French Admiral de Guicheu, 17th April, in the West Indies; Parker's with the

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Dutch fleet, under Zoutman, off the Dogger Bank, 5th August; Grave's engagement with the French in the Chesapeake—all in 1780, and all indecisive, though each was fought with determinative conduct and great bravery. The succeeding lines,

Thy senate is a scene of civil jar, &c.

alludes to the discussions on the American War, and especially to those on Burke's celebrated *Reform Bill*, which took place in the Parliament that assembled on the 31st October, 1780.

NOTE 8.—Page 66, line 3 from bottom.

Sighing millions prophesy the close.

At the commencement of the American War in 1775, the national debt was only one hundred and twenty-four millions; at the close of that unhappy contest in 1783, a few months after the publication of the poem, the amount exceeded two hundred and thirty-eight millions, having nearly doubled in little more than seven years. It is worthy of remark also, that of the original debt no inconsiderable portion had been incurred by the mother country in defending these "lawless children" against the attacks of their powerful neighbours the French and aborigines. At present the yearly interest of the national debt of Great Britain equals a fourth part of the entire amount in the time of Cowper.

NOTE 9.—Page 68, line 3 from bottom.

Kiss the book's outside, who ne'er look within.

Formerly it was the practice in the civil as well as the criminal courts of India to administer oaths to natives and Mahommedans on the Gospel. Sir William Jones was the first to change a system so inadequate to accomplish the ends of justice, and in itself so repugnant to Christian feeling.

NOTE 10.—Page 70, line 10.

But public censure seeks a public foe,
Unless a zeal for virtue guide the blow.

In these lines the poet seems to have intended some reparation for speaking of sins which cannot be mentioned in connection with Britons as a nation, save in reference to our national detestation and abhorrence of their turpitude. Had it not transcended an editor's privilege, we would have expunged the whole as the only passage in Cowper's writings which may not be read with pleasure to the young and pure of the most intimate family circle.

NOTE 11.—Page 70, line 22.

Except a few with Eli's spirit blest,
Hophni and Phineas may describe the rest.

"The description in Expostulation of what the clergy ought to be, is excellent. I will not transcribe the closing couplet; because it appears to me one of the few passages where the warm current of the poet's zeal hurried him into a hasty expression of asperity, not in unison with the native and habitual candour of his contemplative mind."—HAYLEY.

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NOTE 12.—Page 71, line 16.

It sparkles with the gems he left behind.

This appears to be rather loosely expressed. The Romans could leave but a slight impress of their own noble language on the rude dialect of the aboriginal Britons. The classic portion of our modern tongue is a very recent and gradual addition.

NOTE 13.—Page 71, line 24.

Made thee at last a warrior like his own.

The Romans never made their provincial subjects "warriors," except at a late period, when their valour was already on the wane, and then these "exotic legionaries," as a classic historian indignantly terms them, were employed in guarding some distant frontier far from their own home. It was, in fact, the policy of these "conquerors of the world," to encourage pacific arts and dispositions among the nations they subdued. Hence, on the final departure of the Romans, the Britons, unused to war, were incapable of defending themselves against the ruder, but braver assailants who poured in upon them from the northern parts of the island.

NOTE 14.—Page 76, line 31.

A world is up in arms.

Alluding to the coalition and armed neutrality formed by the states of Europe against England in 1780.

NOTES TO HOPE.

NOTE 1.—Page 93, line 11.

Remote, unenvied isle!

The connection of East Greenland with the continent of America was not then discovered. Cowper delighted in reading missionary voyages, and had been so engaged during the winter previous to that in which these lines were written. More recent accounts shew the life which Moravians now lead "amid the frozen waste," to be far less dreary than the poet here represents.

NOTE 2.—Page 95, line 3.

In the person of Leuconomus are portrayed the life and character of George Whitefield, the founder of the Calvinistic Methodists. This celebrated man was born in Gloucester, the son of an innkeeper in that city, 1714. The voyages referred to in the text are those to Georgia and other parts of America. The calumnies by which his living peace was attacked, and his memory after death pursued, originated chiefly in his opposition to what he conceived to be the errors of the Church of England, which caused also his separation from Wesley, who followed

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the Lutheran doctrines. Hence the two sects into which the Methodists are still divided. The powers of Whitefield as a preacher have never been surpassed in any age or country; and if we are to estimate oratory by its effects—the proper criterion after all—his was true eloquence. He died about ten years before the composition of the just and splendid vindication in the text, at the age of fifty-six.

NOTE 3.—Page 98, line 5 from bottom.

"The progress of an awakening, convincing, and converting grace is very powerfully traced in these lines. Cowper spoke from personal knowledge here. Those who mock at such changes, and deem them delusive, because they have not felt the like in themselves, are manifestly incompetent judges; since they only who have had the experience, can testify to the reality of that which must be proved true by experience alone."—MONTGOMERY.

NOTES TO CHARITY.

NOTE 1.—Page 103, line 8 from bottom.

James Cook, the most humane of discoverers, was born, 1728, at Marton in Yorkshire, the son of a day labourer, and was bound an apprentice to the coal trade. He first distinguished himself while master of the Eagle frigate at the siege of Quebec; set out on his first voyage of circumnavigation 1768, and in his third was slain at Owhyhee, 4th July, 1779, two years before Cowper wrote these lines.

NOTE 2.—Page 104, line 10.

Ferdinand Cortes, one of the first names in the annals of romantic but bloody adventure, was born of a noble family in Estremadura, 1485; he embarked for the New World in 1504; engaged in the conquest of Mexico in 1512, with six hundred and seventeen men; discovered California in 1536; returned to Europe four years afterwards in disgrace, and died neglected in his native country, aged sixty-two, having, as he boasted to Charles V, added more kingdoms to Spain, than she formerly possessed provinces.

NOTE 3.—Page 109, line 12.

——I sigh no more
For Africa's once loved, benighted shore.

Cowper, in his letters, gives excellent reasons for refusing to write a poem professedly on the "slave trade," though frequently importuned, alleging, with equal moral and poetical propriety, that the subject would be apt to lead both reader and writer into vulgar and ill founded excitement. In these lines, he concludes with the only real means of removing the opprobrium,—a gradual preparation—an enlightening by information—and a softening by Christianity, of those hearts which would truly feel and rightly use the blessings of liberty.

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NOTE 4.—Page 109, line 24.

John Thornton, Esq. the benevolent merchant of whose charities the poet was well informed, and occasionally the instrument to the poor of his own neighbourhood.

NOTE 5.—Page 109, line 27.

Thine altar, sacred Liberty.

"Liberty always inspires Cowper; no sooner does he name it, than his spirit goes into 'the highest heaven of invention:' words, images, thoughts of light, life, love, pour in upon him like sunbeams through an eyehole in a darkened casement; and he is all himself—all that he ought always to have been." In illustration of this, Montgomery quotes the passage in the text: it is true there is much of exquisite fancy, of the very soul of the sweetest poetry, in the verse; but to us its practical entreaty to "the ten thousand hearts" too often steeled against the "misfortune of being poor," is the most affecting incident of all.

NOTE 6.—Page 110, line 27.

John Howard, of all who have aspired to the distinction, was most justly entitled to the name of philanthropist. In the words of Burke, "to remember the forgotten, to attend to the neglected, to visit the forsaken, and to compare and collate the distresses of all men in all countries," were the objects for which he left home, and affluence, and ease, to visit the prisons of Europe during a period of fourteen years. He died at Cherson, on the Black Sea, 1790, aged sixty-four. The noble lines in the text, we are informed, have been lately inscribed on his monument: in Russia they will be like the handwriting on the wall testifying that the kingdom of despotism is weighed and found wanting.

NOTE 7.—Page 112, line 28.

'Tis truth divine, exhibited on earth,
Gives Charity her being and her birth.

Never were the real purposes of "divine philosophy," or the worthlessness of "knowledge without grace," more eloquently displayed than in this noble passage. There do indeed occur expressions indicative of that contempt of natural science with which Cowper has in some degree been justly charged. Poets and artists, who look at nature as a whole, and describe effects, not causes, are rarely adequate judges of the value of experimental truth; but there was another reason in his case for this alleged disregard. The French encyclopedists were at this period in the height of their career; and Cowper, whose retirement, while it could not secure his ear against the painful intelligence of their success, prevented him from fully appreciating the value of those acquisitions which science was making, seems not to have sufficiently discriminated between them and the moral misapplications of the materialists, facts most important in themselves, and which at this moment form the groundwork of some of the most stupendous practical improvements of the present age.

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NOTE 8.—Page 118, line 13.

And e'en the dipt and sprinkled live in peace.

The Baptists are *dipt*, the Catholics are *sprinkled:* the meaning is, all sects would live in peace, if the universally acknowledged principle, charity, were universal also in practice.

NOTE 9.—Page 118, line 17.

Nicholas Machiavelli, secretary to the republic of Florence, in which city he was born 1469, where he also died, disgraced, maimed by torture, and poor, in 1527. His most celebrated work, "The Prince," has rendered its author a reproach, as the apostle of perfidious and tyrannical politics. Its spirit and tendency have in this been certainly misrepresented or mistaken. The whole is a covert satire on tyranny; and tyrants, fearing this discovery, proscribed the book. An opinion once established, however false, becomes truth by prescription, and for two centuries Italians believed without reading the work; the rest of the world took their word on a point in their own literary history. We recommend the reader to peruse only the last chapter of the work, "On the means of freeing Italy from the barbarians," and then to say if the writer be the friend of servitude.

NOTES TO CONVERSATION.

NOTE 1.—Page 128, line 4.

Sips meek infusions of a milder herb.

Critics have admired the dexterity displayed in this passage, and the easy transition in the simile "respecting ladies and worms being driven away by the use of tobacco." It is rather remarkable, however, that two of Cowper's most intimate friends were noted for their "attachment to the weed." In a poem enclosed in a letter to one of these gentlemen, the poet thus expresses his regret for the passage here:

Forgive the bard, if bard he be,
Who once too wantonly made free
To touch with a satiric wipe
The symbol of thy power—the pipe.
May Newton, with renew'd delights,
Perform thine odoriferous rites;
And so may smoke-inhaling Bull
Be always filling, never full.

NOTE 2.—Page 130, line 14.

Like hidden lamps in old sepulchral urns.

Several passages in the present poem, and in Retirement, are interesting as touching upon points in the author's personal character. Of these, as Hayley remarks, "he is here peculiarly severe on what he

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considered his own peculiar defect,—that excess of diffidence—that insurmountable shyness, which is apt to freeze the current of English conversation." The following little poem, written by Cowper in very early youth, takes an amusing view of this subject. It was addressed to his cousin, Miss T. J. Cowper.

William was once a bashful youth,
  His modesty was such,
That one might say, to say the truth,
  He rather had too much.

Some said that it was want of sense,
  And others, want of spirit,
(So blest a thing is impudence,)
  While others could not bear it.

But some a different notion had,
  And at each other winking,
Observe, that though he little said,
  He paid it off with thinking.

Howe'er, it happen'd, by degrees,
  He mended, and grew perter,
In company was more at ease,
  And dress'd a little smarter.

Nay, now and then, could look quite gay,
  As other people do;
And sometimes said, or tried to say,
  A witty thing or so.

He eyed the women, and made free
  To comment on their shapes,
So that there was, or seem'd to be,
  No fear of a relapse.

The women said, who thought him rough,
  But now no longer foolish,
"The creature may do well enough,
  But wants a deal of polish."

At length improved from head to heel,
  'Twere scarce too much to say,
No dancing beau was so genteel,
  Or half so dègagé.

Now that a miracle so strange
  May not in vain be shown,
Let the dear maid who wrought the change,
  E'en claim him for her own!

NOTE 3.—Page 134, 9th line from bottom.

Did not they burn within us by the way?

Never was the tender simplicity of Scripture language more feelingly preserved than in this passage—"Do not our hearts feel all?" For an affecting instance of the power of the original narrative, in St Luke, personally interesting to the poet, the reader may consult his Letters. Vol. I. p. 9.

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NOTE 4.—Page 137, line 2.

Ambitious not to shine, or to excel,
But to treat justly what he loved so well.

These lines, so beautiful in their expression of sedate force, are believed, upon good authority, to point to Cowper's father; Hayley, however, states that in his experience he never knew one whose practice approached nearer to the description than the poet's own.

NOTE 5.—Page 139, 9th line from bottom.

Keep still the dear companion at their side.

See the Tusculan Questions and Oration for the poet Archias. The poet's admonition here is affecting, and his argument ought to be conclusive. The soul-engrossing devotedness of a virtuous and accomplished heathen to the volumes of a philosophy, beautiful indeed in idea, but whose themes are darkened, and interests transitory, is a reproach to the coldness with which the Christian regards that book whose beauty is heavenly, whose truth is inspiration, and whose concerns belong to eternity.

NOTES TO RETIREMENT.

NOTE 1.—Page 151, line 18.

Scenes of sorrow into glorious day.

The whole of this passage is happily conceived, and beautifully expressed. We discover, too, an interesting connection between Cowper's train of thought, and Sir Isaac Newton's, who said of himself and his sublime discoveries, that he was but as a child picking up a few stones and shells on the shore of the great ocean of truth.

NOTE 2.—Page 154, line 8.

'Tis God's just claim, prerogative divine.

This is the only passage in Cowper's poetry, where, more than by the slightest allusion, he treats of the subject of love. It is a theme which he appears to have studiously shunned, first in these earlier poems from the dread of awakening recollections of youth, which had cast their sadness, as he himself in youth expressed it,

O'er a long night now coming—that never may end;

and afterwards in the Task from considerations of later occurrence. On his early attachment we shall subjoin here some additional information received since the Life was written. The young lady, Theodora Jane Cowper, his cousin, to whom the poet gave his first affections, is

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described as uniting the charms of an elegant person to the accomplishments of a superior understanding. The causes assigned in the Memoir, added "to the idea he entertained, that the union of persons so nearly related was improper," induced Mr Ashley Cowper to withhold his consent to their union. A mutual sense of duty determined the youthful pair to suffer in silent obedience; the issue on the poet's health and understanding is known. The lady remained constant; neither time, absence, nor misfortune, could induce her to change, and she died unmarried, seventeen years after her sister Lady Hesketh, in October, 1824. Sixty years previously, the youthful bard had addressed her thus —and received the assurance so solemnly kept.

How quick the change from joy to woe,
How chequer'd is our lot below!
Seldom we view the prospect fair;
Dark clouds of sorrow, pain, and care,
(Some pleasing intervals between,)
Scowl over more than half the scene.
Last week with Delia, gentle maid!
Far hence in happier fields I stray'd:
Five suns successive rose and set,
And saw no monarch in his state,
Wrapt in the blaze of majesty,
So free from every care as I.
Next day the scene was overcast—
Such day till then I never pass'd,—
For on that day, relentless fate!
Delia and I must separate.
Yet ere we look'd our last farewell,
From her dear lips this comfort fell,—
"Fear not that time, where'er we rove,
Or absence, shall abate my love."

These lines, and others introduced in the notes, are from poems addressed to Miss Cowper, under the name of Delia, and which that lady retained in her own possession till within a few years of her death, when she sent them to a friend, with directions that the packet should be opened after that event, which was accordingly done.

NOTE 3.—Page 156, line 12.

And thou enjoy an Eden ere it fails.

This beautiful passage is extremely affecting, from being so obviously a description of the poet's own case, and of the causes of his *retirement*. Heberden, the amiable physician, mentioned in the commencement, was Cowper's medical friend while in London, where he was born, 1710, and where he died, at the age of ninety. We knew a pupil of Heberden's who recollected his frequently mentioning the poet with great tenderness.

NOTE 4.—Page 160, line 16.

Then all the world of waters sleeps again.

These lines on the ocean are magnificent as the subject itself; the simile—

That shines and rests, as infants smile and sleep,

which contains more of unexpected, yet natural beauty, than any other

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of the same length in the language, reminds us of some juvenile verses by the poet on the picture of a sleeping infant —

Sweet babe! whose image here express'd
  Does thy peaceful slumbers shew;
Guilt or fear, to break thy rest,
  Never did thy spirit know.

Soothing slumbers! soft repose,
  Such as mock the painter's skill,
Such as innocence bestows,
  Harmless infant! lull thee still.

NOTE 5.—Page 163, last line

The author of the Pleasures of Hope, in his edition of the British Poets, says, — "I know not to whom Cowper alludes in these lines, —

Nor his, who, for the bane of thousands born,
Built God a church, and laugh'd his word to scorn."

"It is singular that Campbell should have been ignorant of the fact that Voltaire erected a church at Ferney, with this inscription, 'Deo erexit Voltaire;' and that to this the lines in question refer."—*Manuscript Note on Byron's copy of Campbell's British Poets.*

NOTES TO THE TASK.

BOOK I.

NOTE 1.—Page 174, line 9 from bottom.

Anxious in vain to find the distant floor.

The essential character of Cowper's poetry is its truth. Of all our poets he is least indebted to imagination for his materials. The delineations in the Task especially, even to the description of furniture, are almost all portraits, faithfully copied from the realities around him. The original of these lines, for instance, seems to be alluded to in the following extract from one of Lady Hesketh's letters: — "When it proved a wet evening, and we had no temptation to walk, we continued sitting comfortably round our dining-table, without stirring till after supper. Our friend delights in a large chair; there are two of the latter comforts in my parlour. I am sorry to say, that he and I always spread ourselves out in them, leaving poor Mrs Unwin to find all the comfort she can in a small one, half as high again as ours, and considerably harder than marble. However, she protests it is what she likes, that she prefers a high chair to a low one, and a hard one to a soft one; and I hope she is sincere—indeed, I am persuaded she is."

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NOTE 2.—Page 175, line 22.

So sit two kings of Brentford on one throne.

The two chief magistrates of this ancient and once celebrated burgh, now little better than a mean suburb of London, were originally elected from the two principal crafts, millers and tanners, and still assume the titles of royalty, a distinction, it is said, conferred by one of the Saxon monarchs.

NOTE 3.—Page 176, line 5.

Compared with the repose the SOFA *yields.*

Here, properly speaking, closes the poem as it relates to the subject first proposed by Cowper's fair friend. Henceforward, likewise, the mock heroic versification and light tone of sentiment with which he commenced, evidently in imitation of Philips, give place to an original measure and sustained thought. In all the poet becomes himself, and is consequently at once more dignified, more impressive, and more useful, as he advances in his varying theme. Regarded in itself, the introduction is exceedingly happy as a composition; considered as a prelude to strains of such nobleness and compass, it is doubtless inadequate and unsatisfactory. We cannot, however, agree with those critics who have visited with severity of censure this inequality of the proem, and the future total omission of the subject in the body of the work. That these are great blemishes can be maintained only on a too limited view of Cowper's circumstances when he undertook the poem, or of the plan subsequently adopted. When he first intended a "trifle," it was introduced as one with great propriety. Afterwards, he assumed the subject as men take a seat, not to descant upon so common an invention as a Sofa, but to use it as an appliance; accordingly, like one who reposes in order to gather strength, he dwells on the proposed theme for an instant, then, giving fancy wing, strikes boldly into diversity of topic,—now in varied converse with his reader—now in heart-searching meditation with himself. From a subject which promised so little, he has thus legitimately elicited countless thoughts, delightful, solemn, sublime; admirably illustrating the precept of his favourite the "Sabine bard,"

Ex fumo dare lucem!

NOTE 4.—Page 177, last line.

Groves, heaths, and smoking villages remote.

In the following remarks on this beautiful passage by the author of the *Pleasures of Hope*, there wants only precision to render them as critically just as they are elegantly expressed:—"The flat country where Cowper resided certainly exhibited none of those wilder graces of nature which he had sufficient genius to have delineated; and yet there are, *perhaps*, few romantic descriptions of rocks, precipices, and torrents, which we should prefer to the calm English character and familiar repose of this landscape. It is in the finest manner of Cowper, and unites all his accustomed fidelity and distinctness, with a softness and delicacy which are not *always* to be found in his specimens of the picturesque. The whole scene is so defined, that one longs to see it transferred to painting." The whole, too, is from Nature. Cowper's usual walk, as appears in the arrangement of his subjects, extended westwards from the village of Olney, by a gradual ascent through the fields to the grounds of

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Weston House. Pursuing this route, the visiter, after crossing three fields, attains the "eminence" whence the poet and his companion surveyed so often the prospect here described. In this position, due south, and almost beneath him, the spectator overlooks "Ouse slow winding," the "level plains," the "spacious meads," with their various garniture, till the distance "recedes into the clouds." This is all pleasing English landscape, though to an eye that is but a little conversant with Nature, it is tame, and the formal "cuts," or "dykes," thrown up as protection against the floods of winter, though covered with richest verdure, intersect the expanse too artificially. Every disagreeable feeling, however, vanishes when we think that our gaze now reposes upon scenes which filled the eye and the soul of Cowper with the tear of delight—with the grateful consciousness, that

His Father made them all.

Eastward the "square tower" marks Clifton Church, where Lady Austen first resided with her sister. In this direction, the horizon is skirted by Clifton wood, till due east rises "the tall spire" of Olney Church, where Newton once officiated; continuing this panoramic survey, towards the south-east is seen the village of Emberton, distant about three miles; and beyond, on the horizon, are Bowbrick Hill, crowned by its church, and Steventon, in Bedfordshire,—"the smoking villages remote." On the north, and close at hand, the prospect is intercepted by a hedge-row with trees. Between the west and south extend the scenes described in the subsequent portion of this book, and which lie chiefly in the grounds of Weston. To visit these we must follow the poet. Descending into a hollow, we cross "the weedy ditch," whence the labourer still continues to draw unwholesome water, and reascend, on the opposite side, "the green hill top," to "the peasant's nest." This is merely a better sort of farm cottage, now covered with red tiles instead of "thatch," stripped of its verdant screen, and consequently denuded of all save its poetic charms. The descent from this leads directly into the pleasure grounds of Weston manor, first through a plantation of yews, pines, and firs, conducting to the "colonnade," a fine avenue of chestnuts, which terminates upon the "Rustic bridge," the vignette to the present volume. Rising again, as so graphically described, through "moss" and "wild thyme," the path leads to the Alcove, a view seat of six sides, three of which are open, and three enclosed. The present, however, is not Cowper's seat, which was taken down and rebuilt about twenty years ago, in consequence of a workman, the son of the first builder, having been killed on the spot by a fall, while painting the roof. From the "proud alcove," and its "speculative height," the eye roves over a similar, but much more extensive prospect. Cowper, with proper tact, turns here from the objects as seen on the "eminence," to describe "a woodland scene," by which he has not only varied his delineations, but has left, in these two, contrasted pictures of open and close landscape not to be surpassed in the descriptive poetry of any nation. The remainder of the walk passes "the sharp and steep declivity"—"the little Naid"—the avenue "where sportive light shoots through the boughs,"—all of which still remain nearly as when Cowper drew from them these wonderful sketches—sketches which, viewed beside their originals, excite our admiration the more, that objects so ordinary can, by the spell of genius, be elevated into sources of deep and everlasting interest.

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NOTE 5.—Page 187, line 16.

——— *Kate is crazed!*

Crazy Kate, as we learn from the poet's *Private Correspondence*, was a portrait from life. Like all the sketches which Cowper draws, there is, besides, so much of general nature—the true beau ideal, whether of poetry or painting—both in this, and in the various delineations of character in the Task, that every reader applies them to reminiscences of his own experience. Hence their popularity, on the first appearance of the work, was so great, that they were engraven, and sold very extensively. The poet's friends in the metropolis took care to supply him with these repetitions of his own thoughts as acceptable presents, and the accidental resemblances of these imaginary portraits to individuals in his neighbourhood, as we learn, was sometimes striking. The introduction of Cowper's figures is highly judicious. The reader must have remarked, that the manner of transition in the Task resembles the equability which nature observes in her changes. The poem bears thus a more exquisite analogy with the objects which it describes. The evenness of its tenor in this respect, reminds us of being carried along the smooth current of a stream that waters a country of placid sweetness—sometimes of romantic beauty—and more rarely of sublimity. The scene shifts before us so gradually—the motion is so uniform, that we glide onwards, sensible of proceeding only by observing, not a decided character of novelty, keeping fancy on the stretch, but by the continuous succession of objects almost, yet pleasingly, anticipated in their familiar beauty. Dell and glade, and slope "with nibbling sheep;" or level pastures, and cultivated fields, and busy haunts of industry—cities remote, and antique towers amid ancestral trees; or more modern life succeeds—the dotted lawn—the trim villa, gleaming through its shrubs and greens—the rural church, with sound of evening bells; again the solitude of nature—the lonely common—the blue distance—the far off ocean filling, as with a line of light, the undulations of the almost unbroken horizon. But if a more rapid transition in the chain of thought, or a more awakening note of moral interest, be requisite, the landscape is peopled with human sympathies—the introduction sometimes of a solitary figure, sometimes of a group, brings us back to the feelings and the interests—the joys and sorrows—to the temporal comforts and eternal salvation of our kind.

NOTE 6.—Page 189, line 11.

Thee, gentle savage!

Omai, to whom this beautiful apostrophe is addressed, was a native of the Friendly Islands. He acted as interpreter to Captain Cook, during his third voyage of circumnavigation, and accompanied him to England in 1775. The arrival, in the polished circles of the metropolis, of one "rude from his native bowers," was an event that necessarily excited much attention. Omai became an object of interest to the wise, and of curiosity to the gay; yet, though a person of no consequence among his own people, he shewed so much intelligence, so just a deference to usages which he could not comprehend, united with so proper a reliance upon himself, that even Dr Johnson was charmed with his deportment. To have been praised by our greatest moralist, and painted by the first of British artists, were distinctions which hardly admitted of increase, had not Cowper made the future fortunes of their object the theme of

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his meditations. Johnson's compliment has been pronounced just, because the essentials of good breeding, good sense, and right feeling, are the same in all conditions of mankind; Reynolds' picture of Omai, in his national dress and amid his island scenery, is a beautiful specimen of art; but the verses of Cowper are accused of being unfaithful to the principles of human nature. The representation appears to us, on the contrary, to be both individually and generally correct. Omai was restored to his country, in 1776, with all the appliances which could minister to his comfort, and under every pledge that could give security to their enjoyment; still, when he beheld his protectors about to depart, he entreated Cook with tears to be taken on board and carried back to England. Cowper could hardly know these particulars, yet he has rightly imagined Omai unhappy; first, as an outcast from civilized life, the blessings and refinements of which he had begun to taste; next, as a savage, but denied the conventional advantages which might have reconciled him again to the savage state.

BOOK II.

Note 1.—Page 195, line 19.

Alas for Sicily! rude fragments now
Lie scatter'd where the shapely column stood.

This description is elevated far above the ordinary even tenor of Cowper's numbers; nor is there in Milton a passage of loftier harmony, or embellished with nobler or more awful imagery. But local themes and passing occurrences impress the minds of contemporaries with an importance which no poetical record of the same transactions can embody to successors. The earthquake of 1783, which destroyed Messina and shook the whole island, accompanied also, as it was, with storms and fogs that extended over all Europe, though it deeply affected men's minds at the time, is not now remembered even in Sicily. Yet the ravages of the visitation seem still remarkably recent in many places of the interior. We recollect to have read the description in the text, while seated amid the ruins of a Christian church which had been built within the area and between the remaining pillars of a heathen temple. The former had been cast down, the latter, though two thousand years older, had resisted the shock. The whole presented an incongruous, consequently disagreeable, mass of ruin. Perishable materials,—inelegant design, and unsubstantial workmanship, employed in the service of the living God, while strength, solidity, and beauty, had been given to idols. Alas! thought we, how sad, yet how apt an emblem would our author have found here of the human heart!

Note 2.—Page 198, line 26.

And learn, though late, the genuine cause of all.

Nothing has done more to shut out the beautiful poetry and the pure Christianity of Cowper's page from the hearts and the shelves of the learned, than the exacerbations against philosophy with which the Task is so unnecessarily and so injudiciously filled. Nor has the evil rested with those who could apply the remedy. Unlettered Christians are but too apt to entertain suspicion of human learning; a fatal prejudice is thus fostered in the minds of those readers whose attainments do

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not enable them to appreciate the delightful and the valuable companionship existing between true faith and genuine philosophy. Faith is the consummation of philosophy, philosophy the handmaid of faith. The object of both is the same,—truth: but God is truth. Philosophy leads to this highest, happiest, best of all Truth, as it lies within human reach in the works of the Creator; faith conducts immediately by the word, not merely to the contemplation, but the enjoyment, of Truth in its very essence. They are two streams of knowledge flowing from the same fountain of universal intelligence.

> All truth is from the sempiternal source
> Of light divine.

NOTE 3.—Page 213, line 21.

And stands an impudent and fearless mask.

"The life and adventures of *Discipline*, with the anarchy in public schools which has followed his demise, form a very lively allegorical picture. The metaphor of the quiver and arrows, with which the passage closes, is bold and original in application, though borrowed from a noble scriptural comparison. 'As arrows in the hand of a mighty man, so are the children of our youth.'"—MONTGOMERY.

NOTE 4.—Page 213, last line.

And the land stunk, so numerous was the fry.

Cowper is by many praised as a satirist; we regard in general his attempts in this line as forming neither the most useful nor meritorious portion of his writings. He is too fierce in his severity against vice, and wants playfulness in exposing foibles. No man has successfully cultivated satire who has lived much in retirement. Not only must one know the world, in order to expose its errors, but he must have acquired the coolness and tact, the humanity even, which arise from experience of life and of the mixture of good with evil in human character, before he can hope effectually to reform. Of these requisites Cowper was so destitute, that he not unfrequently mistakes the proper objects of satire, and at others his indignation so far exceeds the offence, that, as in the case of unmerciful punishment, we take part with the offender. His repeated and often unmerited strictures upon the clergy and clerical establishments are particularly to be regretted; they have given to his writings an appearance of sectarian asperity foreign to their real spirit and to his own predilections.

BOOK III.

NOTE 1.—Page 215, line 15.

While the nitrous air,
Feeds a blue flame and makes a cheerful hearth.

The expression here, somewhat affectedly, seems to allude to the nearly contemporary researches of Priestley, who named oxygen gas, on its first discovery, nitrous air.

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NOTE 2.—Page 223, line 8.

I knew at least one hare that had a friend.

Cowper's mode of treating his tame hares, which he first published in the Gentleman's Magazine, is now so generally printed as a part of his works, and is besides so beautiful a sketch in natural history, that it cannot fail to prove acceptable here:—

IN the year 1774, being much indisposed both in mind and body, incapable of diverting myself either with company or books, and yet in a condition that made some diversion necessary, I was glad of any thing that would engage my attention without fatiguing it. The children of a neighbour of mine had a leveret given them for a plaything: it was at that time about three months old. Understanding better how to tease the poor creature than to feed it, and soon becoming weary of their charge, they readily consented that their father, who saw it pining and growing leaner every day, should offer it to my acceptance. I was willing enough to take the prisoner under my protection, perceiving that, in the management of such an animal, and in the attempt to tame it, I should find just that sort of employment which my case required. It was soon known among the neighbours that I was pleased with the present; and the consequence was, that in a short time I had as many leverets offered to me as would have stocked a paddock. I undertook the care of three, which it is necessary that I should here distinguish by the names I gave them—Puss, Tiney, and Bess. Notwithstanding the two feminine appellatives, I must inform you that they were all males. Immediately commencing carpenter, I built them houses to sleep in; each had a separate apartment, so contrived, that their ordure would pass through the bottom of it; an earthen pan placed under each received whatsoever fell, which, being duly emptied and washed, they were thus kept perfectly sweet and clean. In the day time they had the range of a hall, and at night retired each to his own bed, never intruding into that of another.

Puss grew presently familiar, would leap into my lap, raise himself upon his hinder feet, and bite the hair from my temples. He would suffer me to take him up, and to carry him about in my arms, and has more than once fallen fast asleep upon my knee. He was ill three days, during which time I nursed him, kept him apart from his fellows, that they might not molest him, (for, like many other wild animals, they persecute one of their own species that is sick,) and, by constant care, and trying him with a variety of herbs, restored him to perfect health. No creature could be more grateful than my patient after his recovery; a sentiment which he most significantly expressed by licking my hand, first the back of it, then the palm, then every finger separately, then between all the fingers, as if anxious to leave no part of it unsaluted; a ceremony which he never performed but once again upon a similar occasion. Finding him extremely tractable, I made it my custom to carry him always after breakfast into the garden, where he hid himself generally under the leaves of a cucumber vine, sleeping, or chewing the cud till evening; in the leaves, also, of that vine he found a favourite repast. I had not long habituated him to this taste of liberty, before he began to be impatient for the return of the time when he might enjoy it. He would invite me to the garden by drumming upon my knee, and by a look of such expression, as it was not possible to misinterpret. If this rhetoric did not immediately succeed, he would take the skirt of my coat

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between his teeth, and pull at it with all his force. Thus Puss might be said to be perfectly tamed, the shyness of his nature was done away, and, on the whole, it was visible by many symptoms, which I have not room to enumerate, that he was happier in human society, than when shut up with his natural companions.

Not so Tiney: upon him the kindest treatment had not the least effect. He too was sick, and in his sickness had an equal share of my attention; but if, after his recovery, I took the liberty to stroke him, he would grunt, strike with his fore feet, spring forward, and bite. He was, however, very entertaining in his way; even his surliness was matter of mirth; and in his play he preserved such an air of gravity, and performed his feats with such a solemnity of manner, that in him too I had an agreeable companion.

Bess, who died soon after he was full grown, and whose death was occasioned by his being turned into his box, which had been washed, while it was yet damp, was a hare of great humour and drollery. Puss was tamed by gentle usage; Tiney was not to be tamed at all; and Bess had a courage and confidence that made him tame from the beginning. I always admitted them into the parlour after supper, when, the carpet affording their feet a firm hold, they would frisk, and bound, and play a thousand gambols, in which Bess, being remarkably strong and fearless, was always superior to the rest, and proved himself the Vestris of the party. One evening the cat, being in the room, had the hardiness to pat Bess upon the cheek, an indignity which he resented by drumming upon her back with such violence, that the cat was happy to escape from under his paws, and hide herself.

I describe these animals as having each a character of his own. Such they were in fact, and their countenances were so expressive of that character, that, when I looked only on the face of either, I immediately knew which it was. It is said that a shepherd, however numerous his flock, soon becomes so familiar with their features, that he can, by that indication only, distinguish each from all the rest; and yet, to a common observer, the difference is hardly perceptible. I doubt not that the same discrimination in the cast of countenances would be discoverable in hares, and am persuaded, that among a thousand of them, no two could be found exactly similar,—a circumstance little suspected by those who have not had opportunity to observe it. These creatures have a singular sagacity in discovering the minutest alteration that is made in the place to which they are accustomed, and instantly apply their nose to the examination of a new object. A small hole being burnt in the carpet, it was mended with a patch, and that patch in a moment underwent the strictest scrutiny. They seem, too, to be very much directed by the smell in the choice of their favourites: to some persons, though they saw them daily, they could never be reconciled, and would even scream when they attempted to touch them; but a miller coming in engaged their affections at once; his powdered coat had charms that were irresistible. It is no wonder that my intimate acquaintance with these specimens of the kind has taught me to hold the sportsman's amusement in abhorrence; he little knows what amiable creatures he persecutes, of what gratitude they are capable, how cheerful they are in their spirits, what enjoyment they have of life, and that, impressed as they seem with a peculiar dread of man, it is only because man gives them peculiar cause for it.

That I may not be tedious, I will just give a short summary of those articles of diet that suit them best.

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I take it to be a general opinion that they graze, but it is an erroneous one, at least grass is not their staple; they seem rather to use it medicinally, soon quitting it for leaves of almost any kind. Sowthistle, dandelion, and lettuce, are their favourite vegetables, especially the last. I discovered, by accident, that fine white sand is in great estimation with them; I suppose as a digestive. It happened that I was cleaning a bird cage while the hares were with me; I placed a pot filled with such sand upon the floor, which, being at once directed to by a strong instinct, they devoured voraciously: since that time I have generally taken care to see them well supplied with it. They account green corn a delicacy, both blade and stalk, but the ear they seldom eat; straw of any kind, especially wheat straw, is another of their dainties; they will feed greedily upon oats, but if furnished with clean straw never want them: it serves them also for a bed, and, if shaken up daily, will be kept sweet and dry for a considerable time. They do not, indeed, require aromatic herbs, but will eat a small quantity of them with great relish, and are particularly fond of the plant called musk; they seem to resemble sheep in this, that, if their pasture be too succulent, they are very subject to the rot; to prevent which, I always made bread their principal nourishment, and, filling a pan with it, cut into small squares, placed it every evening in their chambers, for they feed only at evening, and in the night: during the winter, when vegetables were not to be got, I mingled this mess of bread with shreds of carrot, adding to it the rind of apples cut extremely thin; for, though they are fond of the paring, the apple itsel disgusts them. These, however, not being a sufficient substitute for the juice of summer herbs, they must, at this time, be supplied with water; but so placed, that they cannot overset it into their beds. I must not omit, that occasionally they are much pleased with twigs of hawthorn, and of the common brier, eating even the very wood when it is of considerable thickness.

Bess, I have said, died young: Tiney lived to be nine years old, and died at last, I have reason to think, of some hurt in his loins by a fall: Puss is still living, and has just completed his tenth year, discovering no signs of decay, nor even of age, except that he has grown more discreet and less frolicsome than he was. I cannot conclude without observing, that I have lately introduced a dog to his acquaintance—a spaniel that had never seen a hare, to a hare that had never seen a spaniel. I did it with great caution, but there was no real need of it. Puss discovered no token of fear, nor Marquis the least symptom of hostility. There is, therefore, it should seem, no natural antipathy between dog and hare, but the pursuit of the one occasions the flight of the other, and the dog pursues because he is trained to it; they eat bread at the same time out of the same hand, and are, in all respects, sociable and friendly.

I should not do complete justice to my subject, did I not add, that they have no ill scent belonging to them, that they are indefatigably nice in keeping themselves clean, for which purpose nature has furnished them with a brush under each foot; and that they are never infested by any vermin.—MAY 28, 1784.

The following extract from one of Lady Hesketh's letters supplies a curious illustration of this little narrative:—"One evening the cat giving one of the hares a sound box on the ear, the hare ran after her, punished her by drumming on her back with her two feet, as hard as drumsticks, till the creature would have actually been killed, had not Mrs Unwin rescued her."

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MEMORANDUM FOUND AMONG MR COWPER'S PAPERS.

TUESDAY, *March* 9, 1786.

This day died poor Puss, aged eleven years eleven months. He died between twelve and one at noon, of mere old age, and apparently without pain.

NOTE 3.—Page 224, line 13.

Or turn to nourishment, digested well.

The following passage, which occurs in a letter written from Olney by Lady Hesketh, proves that the poet here only recommends his own practice. "Mrs Unwin's constant employment is knitting stockings, which she does with the finest needles I ever saw, and very nice they are—the stockings I mean. Our cousin has not, for many years, worn any other than those of her manufacture. She knits silk, cotton, and worsted. She sits knitting on one side of the table in her spectacles, *and he on the other, reading to her (when he is not employed in writing) in his.* In winter, his morning studies are always carried on in a room by himself: but as his evenings are spent in the winter in transcribing, he usually, I find, does this *vis-a-vis* Mrs Unwin."

NOTE 4.—Page 225, line 8 from bottom.

And in thy numbers, Philips, shines for aye
The Solitary Shilling.

John Philips was born at Bampton in Oxfordshire, 1676, and died at the age of thirty-two. While at college, Christ-Church, Oxford, he composed the mock heroic poem, the "Splendid Shilling," the most popular of all his works, and of which Cowper was an enthusiastic admirer. The other writings of Philips, are Blenheim, finished about the same time, or soon after; and a poem on Cyder, in imitation of Virgil's Georgics. He is a pleasing author, but with slender pretensions to originality of genius.

NOTE 5.—Page 225, last line.

A cucumber, while costly yet and scarce.

This entire description is in bad taste; it is ungracefully technical; and the subject is not sufficiently interesting or important for poetry.

NOTE 6.—Page 233, line 25.

——— Lo! he comes;—
The omnipotent magician, Brown, appears.

Lancelot Brown, or "capability Brown," as he was frequently termed, was born at Kirharle, in Northumberland, 1715. He devoted himself to the science of landscape gardening, in which he attained great eminence, acquired a handsome fortune, and died only one year before the composition of the lines of the text, holding the office of high sheriff of Huntingdonshire. The art is altogether English, and, as intimately connected with our subject, requires some illustration here. From the earliest accounts of ornamental gardening in England, to the Restoration, a taste for "vegetable conceits," winding walks, with labyrinths, mounds, and flights of steps, but on a very contracted scale,

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prevailed. Charles II. introduced the French style, as practised by Le Noter under Louis XIV. Nature had little chance with artists who wrought by line and rule; but when the gardens were extensive, there was grandeur, at least, in the lengthened perspective of walks and avenues, though they were straight, as we still see at Marli, Versailles, and Hampton Court. William introduced all the absurd vulgarities of the Dutch school,—troopers in yew, maids of honour in wormwood, green dragons cut out of beech hedges, and vases of box, with parterres of the dimensions and design of pocket handkerchiefs. Nature was rescued from these barbarous inflictions by Addison, Burlington, and especially by Pope. Their enlightened theories were executed by Kent, an artist, who, with some affectation, united much knowledge, great zeal, and an ardent admiration of natural beauty. He was succeeded by Brown, who adopted and extended the principles, but rejected the defects—the crinkum crankum walks and horrors of the rectilineal of his predecessor. The two Reptons, and others, bring down the history of English park and landscape gardening to the present day. The principles of this noble art may be thus stated: aid, but never attempt to force, nature; conceal her defects; reveal, but do not expose, her beauties; consult propriety and the genius of the place.

BOOK IV.

Note 1.—Page 236, line 4.

Sees her unwrinkled face reflected bright.

The structure noticed in this fine introduction, is Olney bridge, consisting of twenty-four arches, placed at irregular distances, and very unequal in size. Its "wearisome but needful length" bestrides the whole width of the valley lying between Olney and Emberton, which, during winter, is often one sheet of water. This occasions frequent damage to the edifice, which is hence so patched as to present now but little of "Cowper's bridge."

Note 2.—Page 239, line 21.

Runs the great circuit, and is still at home.

"We share in Cowper's walks, or his fireside, and hear him comment on the newspapers or the last new book of travels; converse with him as a kind familiar friend, or hearken to the counsels of an affectionate monitor."—Gifford.

Note 3.—Page 241, line 13.

That I, and mine, and those we love, enjoy.

"Of all the verses that have ever been directed to the subject of domestic happiness, those in Cowper's Winter Evening are perhaps the most beautiful. In perusing that scene of "intimate delights," "fireside enjoyments," and "homebred happiness," we seem to recover a part of the forgotten value of existence, when we recognize the means of its blessedness so widely dispensed and so cheaply attainable, and find them susceptible of description, at once so enchanting and so faithful."—Campbell.

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NOTE 4.—Page 242, last line.

Or make me so.

The reader can hardly have failed to remark, that in the poet's numerous and varied descriptions of Nature, the effect of moonlight is never introduced as a chief incident, and even by allusion but rarely. The following extract from one of Lady Heaketh's letters is curiously illustrative of this point:—"Our good friend is always low at full moon, and quite different to what he is at any other time; yet with his wit pierces even the gloom occasioned by this planet; for as we returned last night in the coach from an airing, and after he had talked much of the causes and effects of this wonderful planet, he at last, after fixing his eyes steadfastly upon it, said laughingly,—

I'll instant write a most severe lampoon,
Of which the subject shall be yonder moon.

He is now, I must say, quite freed from the lowering effects of this said moon; but told me this morning, that he was persuaded there was no human creature who did not experience more or less its effects; and added that if I had any *crabs* amongst my acquaintance, he was sure that if I attended to them, I should find them always much more peevish and ill-tempered at the new and full moon than at any other time; for he was sure it influenced the temper as well as the brain, when either was at all disordered. I told him my observations had not extended so far, but I should remember his advice, and take care not to irritate my cross friends at the full of the moon. I must add, it has no effect upon *his* temper, which appears equally sweet at all times."

NOTE 5.—Page 253, line 7 from bottom.

Ere yet her ear was mistress of their powers.

It has been noticed in the *Life*, that the more important "efforts of his youthful muse," to which Cowper seems here to allude, were lost; in the few that have been preserved, the *only* verses that even bear upon the text are the following:—

Oh! to some distant scene, a willing exile
From the wild roar of this busy world,
Were it my fate with Delia to retire,
With her to wander through the sylvan shade,
Each morn, or o'er the moss-embrowned turf,
Where, blest as the prime parents of mankind
In their own Eden, we would envy none,
But, greatly pitying whom the world calls happy,
Gently spin out the silken thread of life!

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BOOK V.

NOTE 1.—Page 260, line 27.

As she with all her rules can never reach.

This exquisite description, elaborated with a curious felicity and miniature exactness resembling the appearances which it delineates, refers to Lavendon Mill, a scene of sweet romantic beauty at the bottom of Clifton Hill, about two miles from Olney. This is still remembered as a frequent resting place in the poet's walks, for it was rural and secluded. The mill, however, no longer marks the spot; it was demolished about twenty years after these lines were written; we have seen its ruins, but are informed that a cotton spinning establishment now occupies its site!

NOTE 2.—Page 261, line 2 from bottom.

Treacherous and false, it smiled, and it was cold.

This description, beautiful in itself, possesses likewise a graceful propriety in the natural transition which it affords, enabling the poet easily to glide into a different, yet by this means, allied subject. The palace of ice was built in the environs of Petersburg, in 1740, upon the marriage of Catherine's favourite minister Gulitzir. According to an account written in the Russian language by Kraff, and published at the time, the dimensions were fifty-six feet in length, seventeen in breadth, and twenty-two in height. The edifice was of one story, of regular architecture, with statues, obelisks, and a portico, which latter conducted into a vestibule, whence folding doors admitted into the only two apartments, opening right and left, each beautifully painted and finished, as described in the text.

NOTE 3.—Page 262, line 1.

——— *Some have play'd*
At hewing mountains into men, &c.

The poet here rather oversteps the limits of history. In ancient times, it was proposed to hew Athos into a resemblance of Alexander, and in our own day the Simplon was to have been fashioned into a statue of Napoleon; but both these conquerors desirous—and selfish as they were in the desire—of fame, rejected a gratification fit only for

Infirm and baby minds.

The most gigantic statues of Greece and Rome were for religious or honorary purposes; the vast sculptures of Egypt are, therefore, the only approach, and it is a distant one, to the allegation in the text.

NOTE 4.—Page 266, line 26.

Not to the man who fills it as he ought.

The most dangerous of all political principles, and the most absurd. Enlightened patriotism is attachment, not to men, but to institutions.

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If, however, the poet's meaning be—and the passage will bear the interpretation—that every king should strive to conciliate personal, as well as constitutional love, the sentiment is as commendable in itself as it is forcibly expressed. Cowper, though, as appears from his letters, fond of political small talk, could boast of no great share of political wisdom. It was hardly worth while, then, to deceive the "good old king," George III. as to Cowper's letters, lest in reading them the sovereign, whose liberality had soothed the misfortunes of the writer, should have discovered that writer to have been ungrateful. "Cowper's *whiggery*," says Hayley, "was *pure* and *innocent* whiggery."

NOTE 5.—Page 268, line 10 from bottom.

As dreadful as the Manichean god.

The Manichean creed recognizes two antagonist principles of equal power,—one of good, the other of evil; consequently, both deserving of worship, the former from gratitude, the latter from fear. The author, or rather systematizer of this heresy, who also gave it a name, was a native of Persia, and flourished in the third century. Philosophers and divines have wasted much useless discussion on this subject; the opinion is in reality the native sentiment of all ignorant, unregenerated, and superstitious minds. The refined speculations of infidel philosophy differ here in nothing, save in sophistry, from the miserable rites of the terror-stricken savage of New Zealand.

NOTE 6.—Page 269, line 9 from bottom.

For which our Hampdens and our Sidneys bled.

John Hampden, born in London, 1594, was killed in the civil war in 1643; Algernon Sidney, born about 1620, second son of the Earl of Leicester, was involved in the Rye House plot, and suffered in consequence. The former of these was a real lover of constitutional liberty, in as much as his exertions were ever directed against unconstitutional innovations; and though it be the custom to rank his patriotism all on one side, true freedom is endangered equally by the encroachments of popular right, as by the extension of the royal prerogative. Hampden, and Sidney too, except in the last *doubtful* act of his life, shewed that they were actuated by this truth.

NOTE 7.—Page 277, line 3.

"It is due to Cowper to fix our regard on the unaffectedness and authenticity of his works, considered as representations of himself, because he forms a striking instance of genius writing the history of its own secluded feelings, reflections, and enjoyments, in a shape so interesting as to engage the imagination like a work of fiction."—CAMPBELL. No one who has contemplated with care the life and character of the poet, can doubt for an instant that the truth of this remark is especially illustrated in the preceding passages, so evidently the history of his early struggles, and lapses, and unavailing repentings. But let not the concluding verses "engage" only the "imagination;" they point to the sole rule of conduct which can secure faltering virtue, or uncloak the hideousness of sin, namely, *gospel religion*. "Our poets have too frequently deviated into an incorrect system of morals, coldly delivered—a smooth, polished, filed down Christianity—a medium system between

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the religion of the gospel and the heathen philosophy—where we wander amidst a waste of sublimated feelings, and rise with heated minds, yet feel that something is still wanting. In Cowper, on the contrary, all is reality; there is no doubt — no vagueness of opinion, the only satisfactory object on which our affections can be fixed, is distinctly pointed out. A perfect line is drawn between truth and error; for, as gospel truth is the base of morality, it is the groundwork of *his* precepts." — GIFFORD, *Quarterly Review*.

BOOK VI.

NOTE 1.—Page 282, last line.

Would urge a wiser suit than asking more.

The reader will remark a striking similarity between the general train of thought here, and the opening of Cowper's last projected work, the Four Ages; his own example at the very close of life thus proving

How readily we wish time spent revoked,
That we might try the ground again.

NOTE 2.—Page 283, line 10.

And through the trees I view the embattled tower.

"The embattled tower" is Emberton church steeple; hence we perceive the connection between the introductory verses and the subsequent train of thought. Cowper must be supposed to have pursued his usual walk to the uplands, where the sound of village bells comes like a spell over his soul, awakening the undescribable, yet not painful mixture of feelings which accompanies the retrospect of early days. From this reverie he is recalled by the same "cadence sweet," which had roused the dormant fancies of many years, and instantly bursts away into his subject, commencing with a rural landscape reposing under a clear frosty noon after a stormy night.

NOTE 3.—Page 283, line 11 from bottom.

And learning wiser grow without his books.

The local scenery here described is on the grounds of Weston House, in a favourite haunt of the poet's—the Spinnie, or Shrubbery. The entrance was, (for they are cut down,) by a lonely alley, shaded by sycamores and oaks; in the midst of the shrubbery itself stands the moss-house, in which were placed the following verses:—

Here, free from riot's hated noise,
Be mine, ye calmer, purer joys,
    A book or friend bestows;
Far from the storms that shake the great,
Contentment's gale shall fan my seat,
    And sweeten my repose.

The painted board with this inscription being stolen, Cowper substituted another, with the lines in the text.

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NOTE 4.—Page 284, line 36.

All we behold is miracle; but seen
So duly, all is miracle in vain.

This doctrine of the poet, though abstractly true, would lead to great practical evils. The suspension or interruption of the laws of Nature is properly a miracle; their continuance and regularity bespeak the omnipotence and providence of the Creator. It is of consequence in the scheme of Christian evidence that this distinction be carefully preserved.

NOTE 5.—Page 288, line 23.

Or promising with smiles to call again.

"The effect of Cowper's ridicule is sometimes injured by the acrimony with which it is attended, and the slightness of its objects: he who spent years in making bird cages and rabbit hutches, should have viewed, as no mortal sins, a game at chess, or a morning's shopping."—JEFFREY.

NOTE 6.—Page 292, line 12.

Does law, so jealous in the cause of man,
Denounce no doom on the delinquent? None.

It is different in our day, which is either more virtuous or more hypocritical than the poet's. "Mercy to his beast" is now enforced upon the owner by act of parliament.

NOTE 7.—Page 295, line 18.

And taught a brute the way to safe revenge.

All judicious critics unite in their disapprobation of this episode of Misagathus. It may justly be characterized as the only instance of continued bad taste in the whole writings of Cowper. In itself, it is startling, improbable, and unpleasing; in reference to the general argument, it is inapplicable, and, indeed, contradictory. The entire portion of the book, relative to the treatment of animals, is too declamatory, and as to the insinuation that the use of animal food is sinful, decidedly false. The concluding paragraph, however, following the passage to which this note refers, is feeling, spirited, and just.

NOTE 8.—Page 297, line 14.

Messiah's eulogy for Handel's sake.

This passage was probably written during the revisal of the proof sheets, since the commemoration was solemnized in the summer of 1784, and in June of that year the poet thus writes to Newton on the same subject. "We are much pleased with your designed improvement of the late preposterous celebrity, and have no doubt that, in good hands, the foolish occasion will turn to good account. A religious service, instituted in honour of a musician, and performed in the house of God, is a subject that calls loudly for the animadversion of an enlightened minister; and would be no mean one for a satirist, could a poet of that description be found spiritual enough to feel and to resent the profanation. It is reasonable to suppose that in the next year's Almanack we shall find the name of Handel among the red-lettered worthies, for it

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would surely puzzle the Pope to add any thing to his canonization." Newton in fact did soon after preach upon this subject, and in a striking manner, though not one of which good taste would approve. He supposes a number of condemned criminals getting up a play on the subject of their own trial and condemnation, and enacting the "dreadful farce" in the interval before their execution. But it may be well to introduce here Cowper's own words, in a letter dated July 19, 1784: "My dear friend, — Notwithstanding the justness of the comparison by which you illustrate the folly and wickedness of a congregation assembled to pay divine honours to the memory of Handel, I could not help laughing at the picture you have drawn of the musical convicts. The subject, indeed, is awful, and your manner of representing it is perfectly just; yet I laughed, and must have laughed had I been one of your hearers. But the ridicule lies in the preposterous conduct which you reprove, and not in your reproof of it. A people so musically mad as to make not only their future trial the subject of a concert, but even the message of mercy from their King, and the only one he will ever send them, must excuse me if I am merry where there is more cause to be sad; for melancholy as their condition is, their behaviour under it is too ludicrous not to be felt as such, and would conquer even a more settled gravity than mine. Yours, my dear friend, — W. C." Handel was born at Halle in Saxony; entered the service of George I. while elector of Hanover; came to England with his royal patron, and died in London, 1759, aged seventy-six. The commemoration took place in Westminster Abbey, being celebrated, in presence of some thousands of spectators, by five hundred and twenty-five voices and instruments. What would Cowper now say, if he read, as we have very lately done, in one and the same newspaper, — that while the British Parliament were recommending a better observance of the Sabbath, the Sunday evening *amusements* of royalty consisted in listening to foreign and *maimed* musicians performing heathen dramas! It is in vain to hope by legitimate enactments to urge men to duties of religion and conscience; but a little more consistency would have been decorous.

NOTE 9.—Page 297, line 6 from bottom.

So in the chapel of old Ely house,
When wandering Charles, who meant to be the third.

The news of the Battle of Culloden reached Ely House on Sunday morning, while the bishop, and his household and immediate flock, were at prayers in the chapel. The clerk, either by order or from his own assurance of doing something acceptable, "gave out" the intelligence, and struck up "to the praise and glory of King George!" William Duke of Cumberland, whose clemency so well became his bravery, was shamefully beaten in every other engagement where he had the command, save at Culloden; witness Fontenoy, Lanfeldt, Hastembeck, and Closter Seben!

NOTE 10.—Page 300, line 15.

The conclusion of the Task, from

O scenes surpassing fable, and yet true,

is grand, solemn, and affecting. Virgil's Pollio, and other passages in the classics with which it might be, and in some lights has been compared,

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it almost as far surpasses, as the sources whence Cowper drew his inspiration excel the turbid fountains of heathen knowledge. In sublimity, even Pope's Messiah is not superior, while in the practical observations there is a pathos—a bosom-searching truth—which the plan of that exquisite performance did not perhaps admit, but which it certainly does not possess. As the Christianity of Cowper was personal, so his poetry, above all other verse, has the power of rendering religion a matter of personal concern with his readers. His works, from Table Talk to this magnificent close of the Task, form one grand epic, whose inspiration is the glory of God, and its object to teach man, with trembling gratitude, to acknowledge His hand from redemption downward to the humblest blessing—to fix upon the human heart a sentiment coeval with time and lasting as eternity—that we, meriting nothing, have received all.

——Θεός σου σοι τόν ὕμνον!

NOTES TO TIROCINIUM.

NOTE 1.—Page 322, line 5.

There is more of practical truth in these remarks than generally obtains in this poem. To excite a vulgar emulation is an easy matter; but to restrain the excitement within the limits of a generous endeavour, and to render youthful ambition a means of moral culture, *demand no* common share of skill and watchfulness in a teacher. We are not prepared to say that emulation should be prohibited in the business of education; but of this we are certain, that it is always a dangerous instrument save under the control of one who is perfectly master of his profession.

NOTE 2.—Page 323, line 7.

Oh, 'tis a sight to be with joy perused.

The line is imitated from the Task, but not happily—a sight is not perused. The preceding paragraph exhibits the very essence of misjudgment and illiberality.

THE END.

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